

12 scenarios shaping a sustainable tomorrow

In this report, we present an analysis of Swedes' attitudes towards different sustainable futures. How desirable do they find them? How likely? Why? And what futures seem actionable enough to make them happen? By answering these questions, we sketch out **a map of the future**.

FOREWORD

This year's Consumption Report is the sixth report produced in the innovation environment at Science Park Borås. The ambition of these reports is to contribute insights and challenge societal actors to change course, staying aware of imminent futures. Experience from the innovation environment at Science Park Borås shows that lack of demand in the circular economy, both business-to-business and towards consumers, is one of the major obstacles to the transition from linear to circular material flows in the economy. Understanding the consumer perspective and the drivers that exist for change is therefore essential for any organization wanting to work with sustainability and circular economy.

A STAIRWAY TO SUSTAINABILITY - 2.0

This year's report investigates over the view of over 1000 Swedes with regard to twelve future scenarios. Three are especially important, deemed both relatively likely and very desirable by those who have answered. This raises the question of how such scenarios can be made into reality.

In previous reports, the *Stairway to Sustainability* model has illustrated the transition from “who cares” to “rare sustainable choices” and additional steps towards a goal-oriented sustainability that respects complexity and what boundaries are set by nature (model on page 37). The three especially important scenarios of this report are not in step 2 – they have yet to happen. In the future, Science Park Borås will (together with other actors in the innovation environment) deepen our common understanding for what might be done to realize the most desirable scenarios. Together with our partners, we will investigate what effects the work on these scenarios might have with regard to business models and relationships with end consumers.

WHY WORK WITH FUTURES SCENARIOS?

When the conversation about futures is absent, it becomes difficult to imagine a transition to economically, socially and ecologically sustainable societies. Without the ability to imagine and discuss these futures, it is nearly impossible to take practical steps towards them. This is why Science Park Borås has been hosting the think tank **Normskifte** since 2023, an initiative to change norms from linear to circular economics. One of the key duties of this think tank is to contribute new images of the future and encourage decision makers to discuss which futures may or may not be desirable. Fundamentally, this is important for the democratic dialogues carried out by modern liberal democracies, but is also important for businesses aiming to be on the cutting edge of sustainability.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details the responses of over 1000 Swedish inhabitants to 12 scenarios developed in a collaboration between Science Park Borås and Kairos Future. The twelve scenarios each describe a possible future, themed around sustainability and consumption, ranging from outlawing advertisement to a world shaped by climate disaster.

Each scenario has been rated in terms of probability and desirability. This gives rise to five broad groups of scenarios, which have been titled hopeful, dystopian, dismissed, distant, and actionable. Hopeful scenarios are those most respondents believe will happen, and which are seen as optimistic. Dystopian scenarios are likely, but undesirable. The dismissed futures are neither likely nor desirable. The last two categories describe scenarios which are broadly desirable, but seen as requiring more action to happen – the distant futures are very difficult to bring about, but the actionable futures, of which three are primarily interesting, indicate potential for transformation and action by policy makers.

These three scenarios are radical circularity, in which at least 50% of raw materials are recycled, sophisticated incentives in which there are precise incentives for sustainable behaviors, and production close to home in which more goods are produced closer to the end consumer. These three scenarios alongside the other optimistic scenarios indicate possibility for policy makers to take radical action to create a more sustainable, realized, future.



METHODOLOGY

This report is based on 12 scenarios derived from a series of discussion sessions held with Kairos Future and Science Park Borås. Initially a broad scope of scenarios were designed and discussed, to be focused down on 12 key scenarios to present to the general public in the form of a survey. The twelve scenarios were selected based on contrast to each other, aiming to paint a broad image of possible scenarios. The wording was then revisited to frame each scenario as clearly as possible.

When the scenarios were presented in the survey, 947 complete answers were collected out of a total of 1124 respondents, contacted via a panel representative with regards to age, gender, and geography. The survey was conducted from the 7th to 22nd of March 2024. The 12 scenarios were presented to the respondents letting each respondent gauge how desirable and likely each scenario seemed to them. Following the scenarios were a battery of background questions about political leaning, view of sustainability, as well as demographic factors like age, gender, region, and income. This is standard to Kairos Futures long-term survey methods.

Having collected the data, an index of likelihood and desirability was calculated based on the difference between the percentage of those who viewed a given scenario as likely versus unlikely and desirable versus undesirable. The scenarios were then mapped with the likelihood index forming the X-axis and the desirability index forming the Y-axis. A likelihood index score of -1,0 would indicate 100% of respondents considered the scenario unlikely and none considered it likely, and conversely, a score of 1,0 indicates 100% of respondents consider the scenario likely, and none unlikely. An index score of 0 indicates perfect balance between the percentage of respondents who view the scenario as unlikely and likely.

The full survey can be downloaded [here](#) (in Swedish).



TWELVE SCENARIOS

This report imagines twelve sustainable futures, briefly summarized below:

Note that the scenario working titles are simply used in the report ease of discussing them. Respondents were simply shown the scenario, not the titles. The full scenario description can be read in each scenario analysis.

Scenario working title	Brief scenario description
Sophisticated Incentives	Financial incentives for sustainable behavior become commonplace for consumers.
Radical circularity	At least 50% of raw materials must be recycled or reused, leading to less waste.
Catastrophe-driven consciousness	One or many major climate disasters spark greater concern for and collaboration on environmental issues worldwide.
Post-growth sustainability	People scale down their consumption and focus on sustainability without growth.
AI-coaches for sustainability	Sustainable behavior is encouraged and guided by an AI.
Production close to home	More production of goods close to the end consumer, fewer globalized supply chains.
No more ads	Advertisement is heavily curtailed and limited, both in digital and physical spaces.
We own nothing	Most products are rented or shared instead of owned and bought.
More referendums	Most climate policy is settled by referendum.
Technocrats in charge	Most climate policy is settled by technocrats and experts.
Innovation solves everything	Innovation solves most of the climate crisis without a need to reduce consumption.
Climate-consciousness as luxury	Climate consciousness becomes a high-status marker for the wealthy elites.



CREATING A MAP OF THE FUTURE

A common error when predicting the future is to over-determine outcomes based on constraints faced in the present. It is not possible to know what will change and what will remain the same; but it is possible to imagine factors and aspects of society that could change, permitting an outlook towards several possible futures.

With these in mind, it becomes furthermore possible to measure what aspects of the present could be changed, either because they are very easy to affect, or because there might be sufficient willpower to cause even a difficult transition to occur.

This report presents twelve sustainable tomorrows in a “map of the future”. It investigates whether the population of Sweden views them as likely to occur, desirable or not, and if there is a sense of willpower to make them happen even if such a transition should prove difficult. On the horizontal axis of the map is whether the scenario is likely to occur, and on the vertical axis whether it is considered desirable or undesirable. The coordinates are derived by the percentage of those finding the scenario likely or desirable, respectively, minus the percentage finding the scenario unlikely or undesirable. Those with a neutral opinion do not affect the map results.

The twelve tomorrows are analyzed individually in the following pages of the report. A brief overview of all twelve follows, alongside a categorization of these futures into five rough categories, ranging from utopian to dystopian to improbable. The boundaries between these categories are somewhat arbitrary, not hard-and-fast labels that can never be changed; a scenario which is dismissed by both Swedes could still

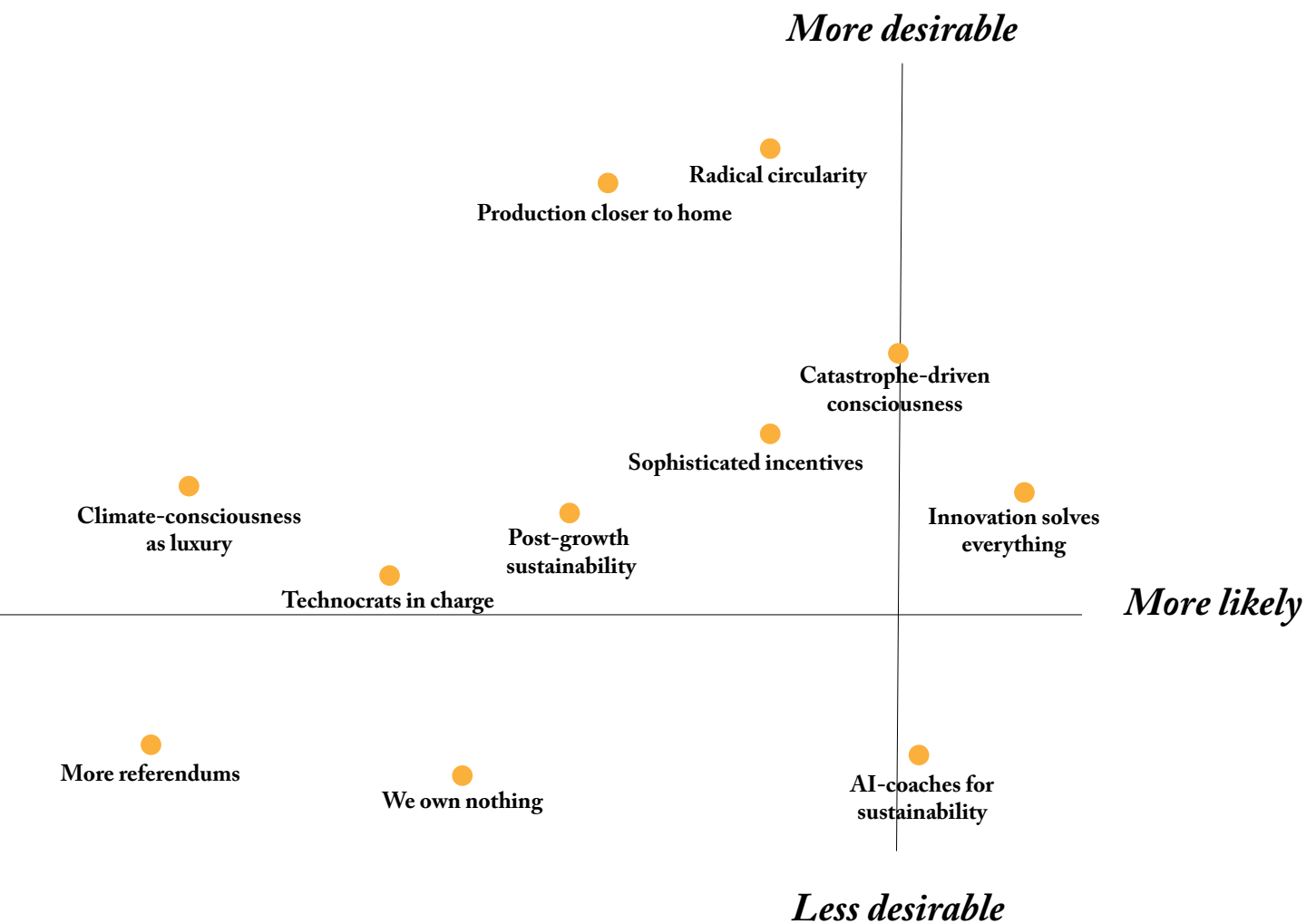
occur if something unexpected or drastic were to occur, and conversely, there is no guarantee a given future will occur simply because it is both desirable and seen as likely to happen. With that caveat out of the way, the twelve sustainable tomorrows can be sorted into a map of the future, based on which the scenarios are subdivided into five general “areas” on the map.

Less likely


No more ads



Figure 1. A conceptual map of the future. On the horizontal axis is the index for **likelihood**, with scenarios considered by more respondents to be very likely in the positive direction and very unlikely in the negative direction. Conversely, on the vertical axis is the index for **desirability**, with scenarios considered by more respondents to be very desirable in the positive direction and very undesirable in the negative direction. The index does not count those who expressed no strong opinion on the scenario.



FIVE TERRITORIES OF THE FUTURE

With the map arranged as above, based on the responses of those surveyed, five general “territories” or “areas” emerge. Some scenarios seem both likely and desirable, while conversely, others are neither. Simply because two scenarios are both in the same region of the map does not mean they will both become true; indeed, some scenarios might even be mutually exclusive. But dividing the map into territories allows for a simpler categorization with regards to what action would be necessary to implement or avert a given scenario. Put simply, scenarios belonging to the same territory put similar demands on decision makers and have similar paths to implementation, even if the futures they describe are wildly dissimilar. Revisiting the map with this in mind, the five territories are as follows:

The category of **hopeful futures** is marked in **green**. These are the scenarios considered both likely and desirable, positive outcomes that a majority of respondents think will occur without necessarily any further action on their own part. Looking down the road to the future, they seem possible and not like something that could or should be averted.

Dystopian futures are marked in **red**. This category (holding a single scenario) is viewed as likely, but undesirable; a negative future on the horizon that respondents would on balance prefer to avert but think will probably still occur.

Dismissed futures are marked in **brown**. This category are futures that seem neither possible nor desirable by most respondents. On balance, more find them both unlikely than likely, and undesirable than desirable. This category is essentially dismissed as futures that neither could nor should occur.

Distant futures are marked in **orange**. These are scenarios that respondents view as neutral or positive on balance; scenarios that are maybe somewhat desirable, but so unlikely that little could be done to make them happen. While some respondents would find them very positive, many also dislike them, and there is a broad consensus they probably will not occur anyway.

Actionable futures, finally, are marked in **blue**. These are scenarios that do not seem likely today, but which are considered both desirable on balance, and not too unlikely. They may seem distant today, but they are not altogether dismissed. With enough political willpower, perhaps they could still occur, despite there being no obvious path to these futures to a majority of respondents today.

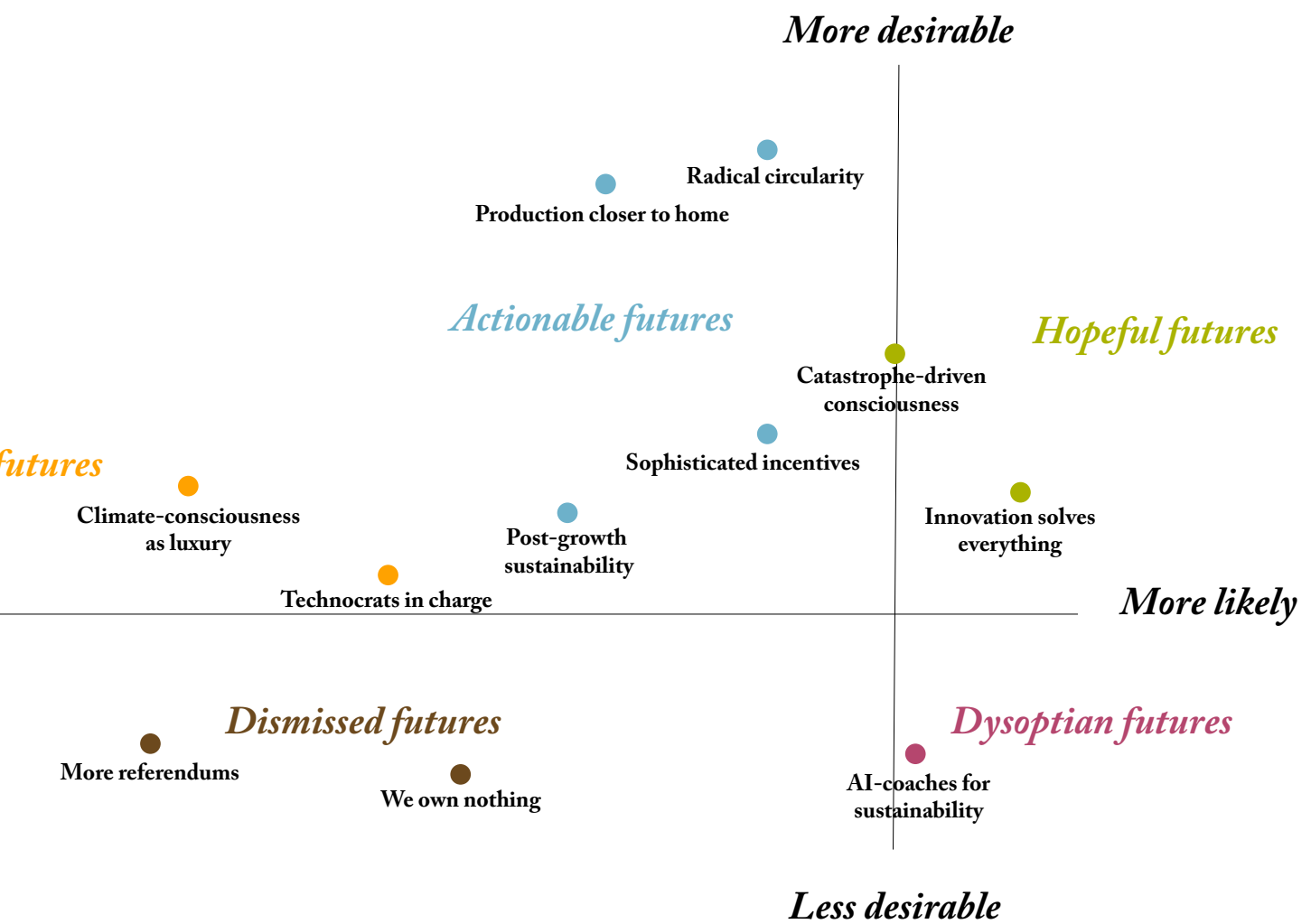
Distant j

Less likely

●
No more ads



Figure 2. A map of how the different scenarios are distributed on the desirability and likelihood scales as shown in figure 1. Here they are also grouped in five categories of futures, as explained in the text above.



WHO IS THE FUTURE FOR?

There are, naturally, some differences in how these future scenarios are viewed. Opinions are not monolithic. The differences are most determined by personal opinions about sustainability, and what values the respondent associates with environmental issues. To some extent differences are also shaped by political opinion and demographic factors like gender and age. Overall, though, the differences are small; Swedes seem fairly united in which scenarios are regarded as positive or negative. An overview of the general demographic trends follows here; in each scenario, outliers or differences for that specific scenario will be further described.

Firstly, **political opinion** shapes the view of the scenarios. Most scenarios are regarded as more positive by people who self-describe as belonging to the left, and especially more positive by people who self-describe as being concerned with global issues over national ones. Self-described nationalists are the most pessimistic with regards to all twelve scenarios save two. Most impactful on opinion about the scenarios, though, are the views on sustainability, with people who say they “do not care about sustainability” having – probably entirely predictably – a lower opinion of all twelve scenarios, considering them both unlikely and unpleasant. Only three scenarios are considered relatively desirable by this group, and all twelve are considered unlikely.

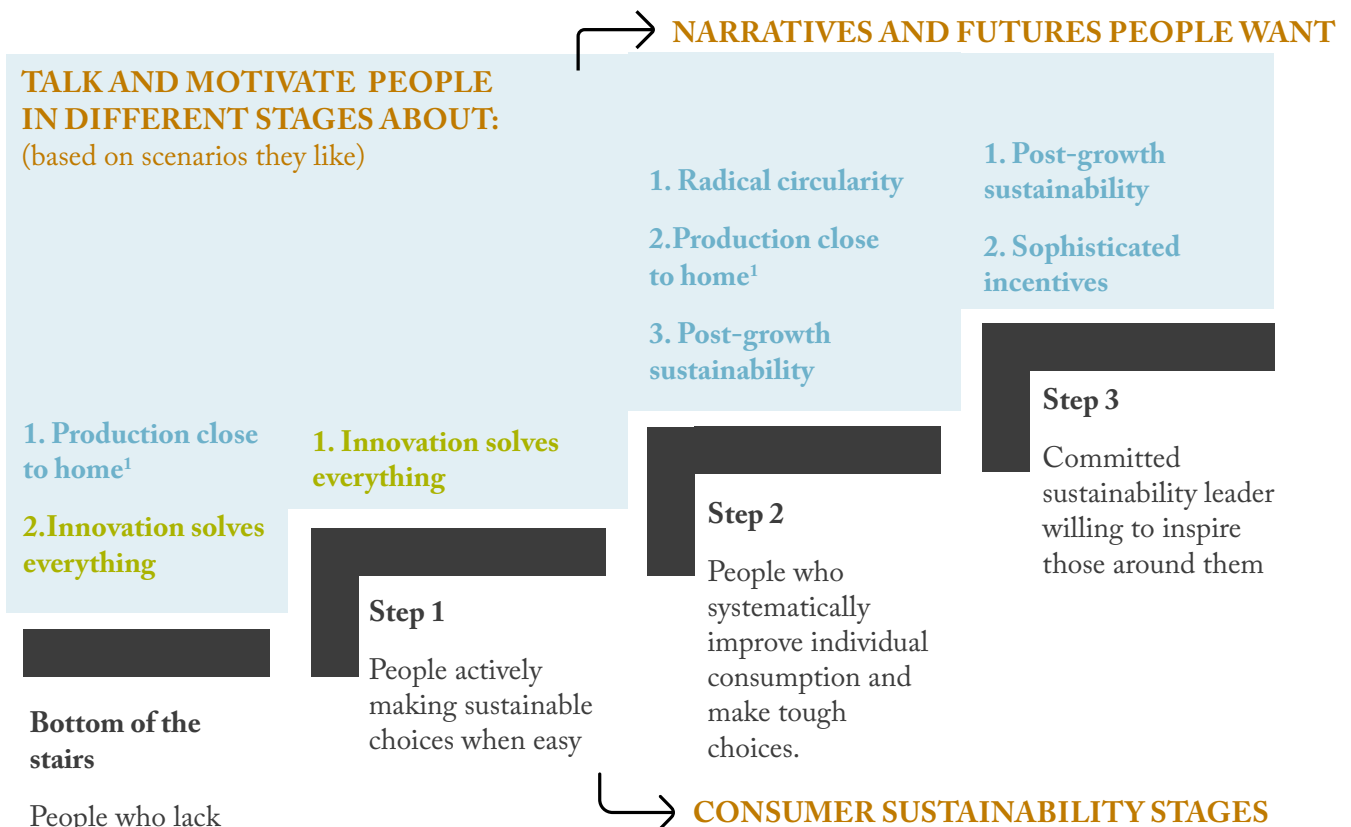
Demographically, there are also differences. For most scenarios, women find them more desirable than men. Likewise, for most scenarios the older generations are more skeptical than younger, with young people being more prone to describing almost all scenarios as likely rather than unlikely by comparison. Income and geo-

graphical differences also play a role, though the trend is less clear, and the difference varies between scenarios with regards to which are seen as more or less likely by people in the cities, people on the countryside, and people with higher and lower incomes respectively.



HOW TO ACT?

The scenarios are particularly useful when deciding how to communicate with people and customers. The Stairway to Sustainability can be used to navigate what stage of sustainability people are in, as well as which scenarios they find desirable in each stage. **Take the time to figure out where your customers are** (in sustainability maturity) **and what they want to hear.**



1. Production close to home appears at the bottom of the stairs and in step 2. Our hypothesis is that at the bottom of the stairs, this is motivated by economics and bringing back jobs, as respondents report not caring about sustainability. In step 2, we suspect it is more strongly tied to the environmental aspects of low transports for goods.

Figure 3. The **Stairway to Sustainability** model presented in previous versions of the report. Its intent is to help companies reflect on the stages that their customers find themselves in, as well as how to help them take a next step up. It is described more in detail in the 2022 report (page 74), along with tools to help companies ideate.

Based on overall popular scenarios, we looked at which scenarios were popular among the different stages that consumers find themselves in. Step 1-3 are based on answers regarding willingness to pay for sustainable products. Bottom of the stairs based on consumers who report not caring about sustainability.



SOPHISTICATED INCENTIVES

Imagine that in 2035 there are sophisticated means of rewarding those who consume sustainably. For example, there could be deposit systems on all types of waste where you get money back for sorting it, or tax breaks if your carbon dioxide emissions are very low. In addition to subsidies on sustainable products, there are also tangible rewards for those who choose to consume less and assume responsibility for the environment, which are based on sharing all data about your consumption and what you consume. Conversely, the prices will be high for those who don't care.

In the world of sophisticated incentives, sustainability in 2035 is shaped through influencing consumer behavior directly, by means of incentives like tax breaks and other financial measures. Those who consume sustainably save or even make money, while those who contribute to environmental harm suffer commensurable economic consequences, on scales both large and small. This is a future in which sustainability is directly tied not just to national budgets, but also directly to household budgets – to act responsible for the environment is simply to be fiscally responsible. By aligning household budgets with climate budgets, excessive or unsustainable consumption is not altogether halted, but it is controlled, and costs to the environment are made more readily apparent to the end consumer.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

Overall, respondents found this one of the most positive scenarios with a view to 2035. Over one-third of citizens rated the scenario as very desirable, with only 15% rating it as very undesirable; most found the scenario on balance more positive than negative. Those who are positively inclined to this scenario view it as a tangible, practical means of creating sustainable con-

sumer behavior – something many believe does not exist today in 2024. Those in favor of it even ask themselves why systems like these are not more broadly implemented at present, indicating the year 2035 may be too late to begin with a system of incentives that hardly seems far-fetched today; but there are also criticisms, predominantly involving the lack of integrity and excessive surveillance such a future would involve. Many also don't view individual consumers as directly responsible for sustainability, and would rather place the complex economic incentives more on industries and service providers.

How to practically make the scenario work is the biggest uncertainty. Despite this, the scenario is rated as relatively likely by most respondents, possible to implement and more desirable than undesirable. This places the scenario among one of the actionable futures, viewed as unlikely right now but could be made to happen with the right political will and coordinated effort.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

The youngest demographic, aged 18-29 and born after 1995, regard this scenario as being likely to occur on balance, and thus place this scenario not as an actionable future but regard it as a hopeful future. Seen to the youngest respondents only, they view the scenario as far easier to bring about.

There are some differences politically and with regards to opinion about sustainability. While the scenario is more popular among self-described left-leaning people concerned with global issues, both people who identify as right-leaning and nationalist-leaning still consider the scenario on balance to be positive and actionable.



Actionable future

37%

find the scenario **desirable**

15%

find the scenario **undesirable**

16%

find the scenario **likely**

23%

find the scenario **unlikely**

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Of those who regard the scenario as positive, 68% think they can contribute to making such a scenario occur. This makes this scenario by far the one where individuals feel the most hope and the most responsibility in terms of bringing about such a future – perhaps by voting for more incentive structures, or by “voting with their wallet” to make businesses more inclined to participate in political programs involving sophisticated incentives for consumers.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

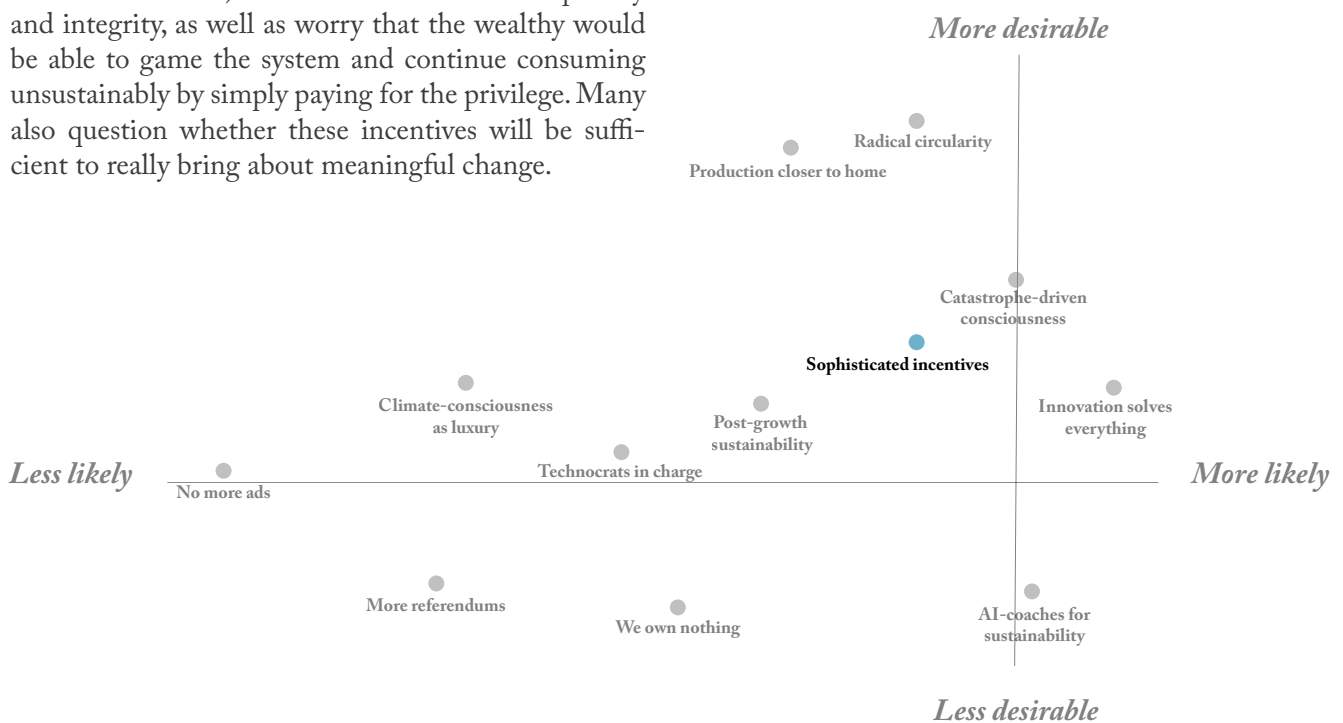
Respondents consider this scenario positive because it addresses the sustainability crisis in a practical and hands-on manner, but have concerns about privacy and integrity, as well as worry that the wealthy would be able to game the system and continue consuming unsustainably by simply paying for the privilege. Many also question whether these incentives will be sufficient to really bring about meaningful change.

QUOTES

“I am relieved that we will find a system to appreciate sustainable practices. In today's society, much of the environmentally harmful resources are consumed because it has become part of everyday life for most people. Therefore, the other individuals who take more into account their choices concerning the environment and emissions should be rewarded for thinking about the next generations.”

“I think it will be difficult to apply due to the fact that it takes money from other parts of society and that the punishments/rewards are high enough for it to have a significant effect. One example is to weight them depending on income so that it feels equally hard regardless of social class.”

“Dystopian. If by 2035 we have not progressed further than talking about individual carbon dioxide emissions, the world is in bad shape. Garbage sorting is good but doesn't solve any problems. The whole concept is based on propaganda from oil companies to prevent real change through regulation by them and other companies distracting people with individual guilt.”



RADICAL CIRCULARITY

Imagine that in 2035 there are strict requirements for reuse, recycling and product durability. With at least half of all raw materials for new products required by law to be reused or recycled, companies have an incentive to recover all waste, and waste management has become an extremely valuable industry. The lifespan of products has also become extremely important. Most products have a 10-year warranty and if they break prematurely, consumers can get their money back.

In this scenario, we operate under the assumption that a paradigm shift has occurred in the way we approach resource management and product design. Stricter government regulations have driven companies to compete on the basis of circularity. Many are heavily investing in developing innovative circular business models and closed-loop sourcing systems. They now view every product at the end of its life not as waste, but as both a valuable resource to be recovered and as a legal liability that needs to be reintegrated into the manufacturing process. By setting high product durability standards as norm, consumer expectations are also increasing.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

Radical circularity was found to be the most desirable scenario among respondents, with 63% of Swedes considering it to be desirable. Notably, it was also ranked as the least undesirable scenario, with only 4% indicating they found it “very undesirable”. Looking at what respondents have chosen to say about a radically more circular future shows us a predominantly positive picture, at least in theory. Most think it is generally a good idea for businesses and industry to reuse, recycle and repurpose. There seems to be general agreement that products ought to last longer and that products have

gotten worse with time. On the other hand, those less positively inclined also indicate that it feels like this scenario would affect profits too much, and that everyone would need to be subject to the same rules for it to work. There are also questions raised about the quality of certain materials if harsh circularity rules are put in place. Overall, Swedes are positive but have doubts about general feasibility and practical implementation.

The doubts about how it would work in practice are reflected in the likelihood estimates. 16% of Swedes report this scenario as being very likely which is more than most other scenarios. 22% consider it very unlikely – less than other scenarios. **This places radical circularity as the most actionable scenario in the study**, a scenario that could well be rendered possible with enough thought-leadership work.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

The youngest demographic, aged 18-29 and born after 1995, regard this scenario as being likely to occur on balance, and thus place this scenario not as an actionable future but regard it as a hopeful future (for this demographic group). Seen to the youngest respondents only, they view the scenario as far easier to bring about.

Women tend to view this scenario as slightly more desirable and likely than men, though that it the case with most scenarios in this study. Taken from an income perspective, there are almost no differences: both high and low income households regard it similarly.

There are some differences politically and with regards to opinion about sustainability. While the scenario is more popular among self-described left-leaning people concerned with global issues, both people who identify



Actionable future

63%

find the scenario **desirable**

4%

find the scenario **undesirable**

16%

find the scenario **likely**

22%

find the scenario **unlikely**

as right-leaning and nationalist-leaning still consider the scenario on balance to be positive and actionable.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Of those who regard the scenario as positive, 56% think they can contribute to making such a scenario occur. This makes this scenario the second on the ranking of scenarios where individuals feel the most hope and the most responsibility in terms of bringing about such a future.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

This scenario is viewed as very concise and clear in what it would entail, and less theoretical. Therefore, it is viewed as positive. Generally, people are favorable towards reducing unnecessary consumption

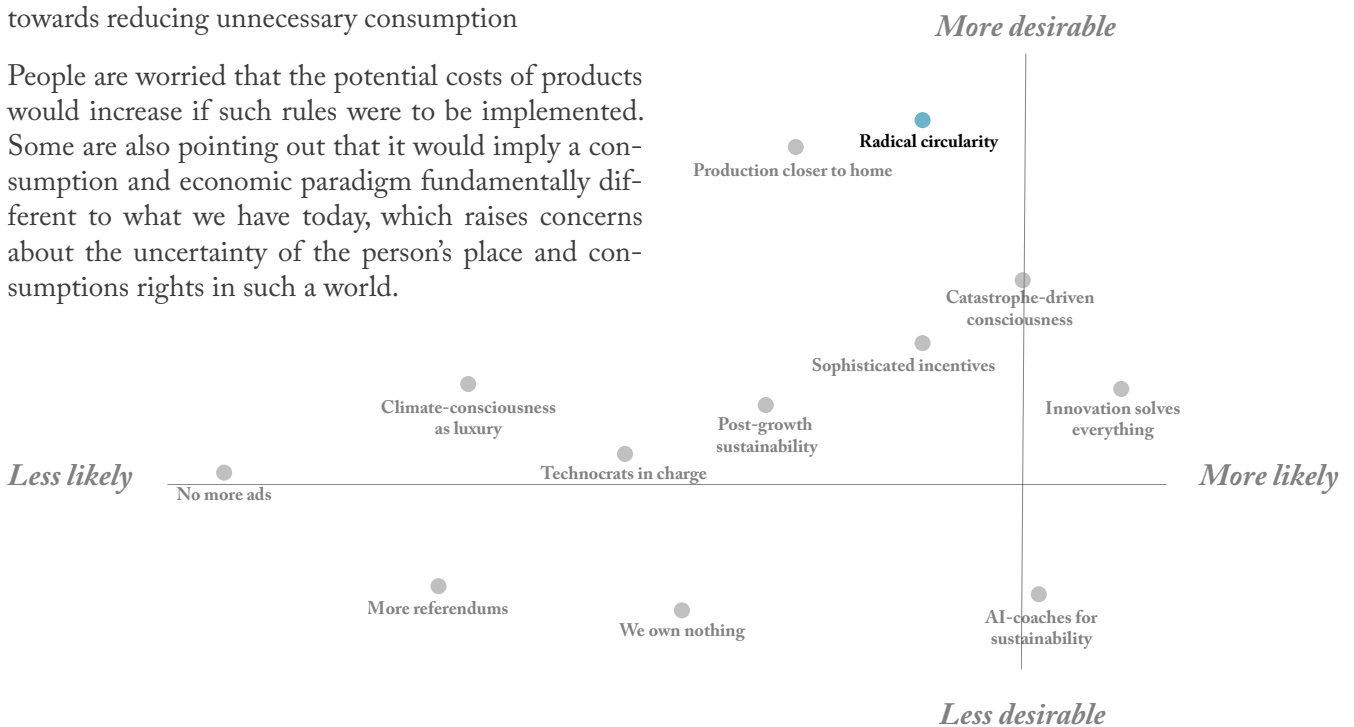
People are worried that the potential costs of products would increase if such rules were to be implemented. Some are also pointing out that it would imply a consumption and economic paradigm fundamentally different to what we have today, which raises concerns about the uncertainty of the person's place and consumptions rights in such a world.

QUOTES

"I wish we could be sure that a higher price corresponded to better durability. The right to [a 10-year warranty] would be a solution - not bad at all! The question is whether anyone can push this through. The market will not do it, there are too many people who have poor finances and must take the cheapest possible for the moment."

"Could happen but also not. The economic benefit would decrease with products that have a longer shelf life but on the other hand are more environmentally friendly. So the government has both good arguments for and against adopting such a bill. I think it would be positive on the whole. The culture of consumerization today is harmful on many levels and we would do well to try to get out of it."

"These are good proposals. But it takes legislation and hard long-term work to make this happen. Unfortunately, the people are not pushing. People have too much on their minds and politicians are only concerned with getting re-elected next term. They make short-term choices that do not benefit us in the long run. Unfortunately, I believe that this, like the other proposals, will not happen."



CATASTROPHE-DRIVEN CONSCIOUSNESS

Imagine that by 2035 there have been so many environmental disasters around the world that sustainability has become the most important political issue worldwide. Governments and states are working together to defeat climate change in the same way that they agreed to tackle the COVID-19 emergency in 2020. Climate change has risen to the top of the agenda and other issues are lower priorities in both national and international politics.

This scenario was born out of the mindset that prevailed during the Covid-19 pandemic: a clear reshuffling of national and international priorities combined with strict measures to minimize social and economic damage while tackling the urgent issue.

In today's world, where we find ourselves grappling with multiple crises simultaneously – the so-called metacrisis – our collective attention often resembles the fragmented focus experienced in the digital age. We struggle to concentrate on a single issue, constantly bombarded by a myriad of pressing concerns. It raises the question: will it take a catastrophe to jolt us into a state of unified action? In Kim Stanley Robinson's acclaimed climate-fiction novel "The Ministry for the Future," a devastating climate disaster serves as the catalyst for a global realignment of society's priorities - *perhaps a possible future.*

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

When looking at the free-text answers respondents gave, the general feeling is that it may be a bitter imperative to create change. Many express that it is a tragic, difficult and theoretically undesirable scenario, but that it may well be fundamentally necessary to get meaningful policy. Many view large entities from governments to corporations as being too short-term

focused to act on the potentially economic harmful consequences.

This scenario was seen as the most likely of all the 12 scenarios in the research, with 22% of Swedes reporting that they consider it somewhat or very likely. The exact same percentage, 22%, considered it to be somewhat or very unlikely. Skepticism towards political efficacy and ability to cooperate was the main concern for those viewing the scenario as less likely.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

There are no major variations in the desirability or likelihood estimation factors when broken down by groups (income, urbanization, age, etc) except between men and women. Female respondents considered the scenario desirable as well as likely to occur in the future twice as frequently as men – which raises questions about where this significantly different perspective stems from.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

About 20% believe that this scenario is desirable and feel like they could actively contribute to making it a reality. Interestingly, only 3% view the scenario as undesirable and feel like they could actively contribute to stopping it.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

Respondents generally hoped that major disasters would not be required to tackle climate change on a global level and spark worldwide cooperation. There is also significant hope that climate change can still be addressed if enough is done.

Concerns are raised about a few main themes. There is



Hopeful future

45% find the scenario desirable	12% find the scenario undesirable	22% find the scenario likely	22% find the scenario unlikely
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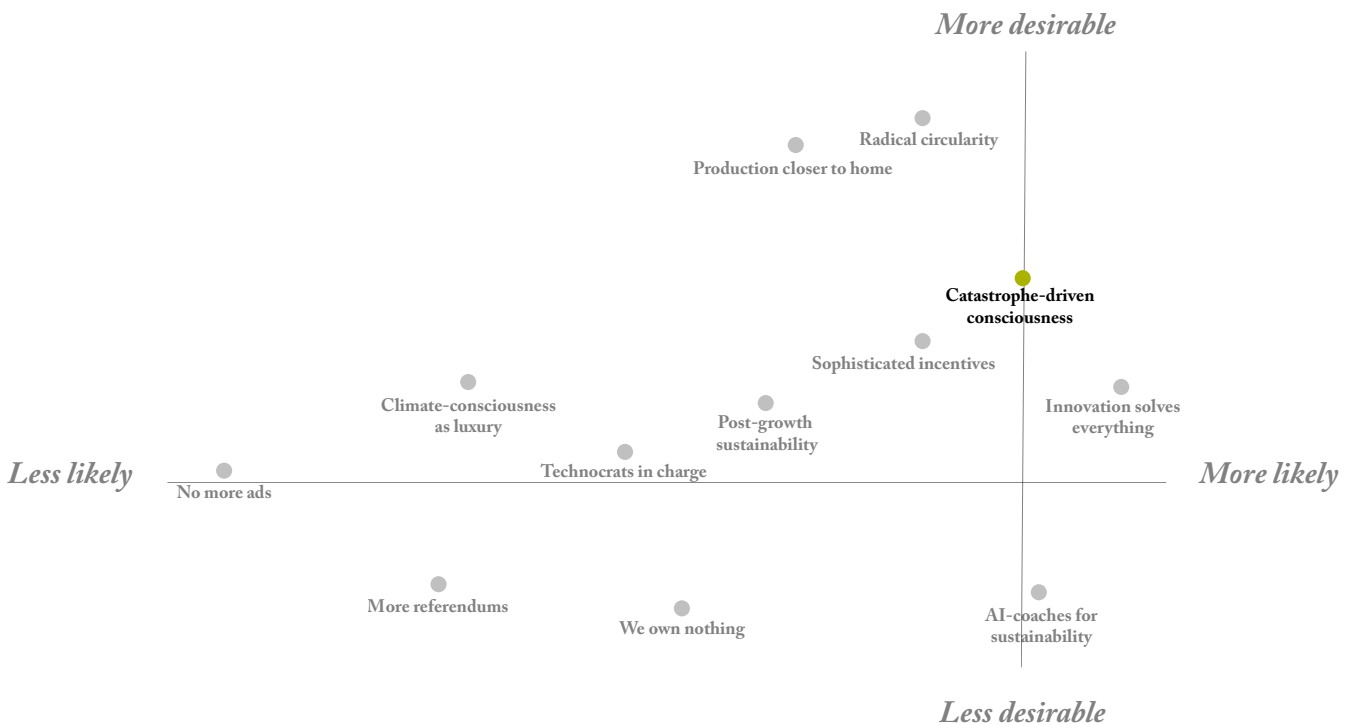
considerable skepticism about whether it is realistic to achieve global cooperation in the climate and environment area given the interests and priorities of different countries. Similarly, current economic incentives are seen as hard to overcome. Some respondents point out that the climate issue, while important, is not the only environmental issue that needs to be addressed, such as overfishing, habitat destruction and littering.

QUOTES

"The Covid issue was not resolved through international cooperation. There was some, but much of the world was left out. Work on sustainability cannot be modeled on this because it is a struggle between two parts of the world: those who own virtually everything and the rest. Short of war and extreme repression, we cannot force countries that have started their economic development to stop it. They, too, must do as we did and break through black clouds of coal and oil and drudgery - or we will brutally share our wealth. The latter will not happen, not least because that wealth is underpinned by large economic forces whose interest lies in something other than sustainability. Ordinary people cannot share and will never want to do so."

"This scenario is the most likely and the darkest. In this scenario, I mean that it is too late for humanity. By highly desirable, I mean that at least in this scenario I hope that politicians and people come together. But that is usually the case. Like health care. We treat the side effects as best we can until we can't/are too many/late."

"Not that I want environmental disasters to happen, but they are likely to happen and very desirable if cooperation between countries is developed."



POST-GROWTH SUSTAINABILITY

Imagine that in 2035 it will have become a priority to downshift the economy and to consume and produce less. We no longer try to compensate for the fact that we consume so much of the earth's resources, but instead put the emphasis on consuming less. Plans to try to "invent away" the climate crisis have been abandoned, instead there are high taxes on oil and other fossil fuels and harsh penalties for companies that consume too much. Most people consume significantly less and travel less than they do today, and have more time to spend with friends and family.

On the 15th of May 2023, president of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen took to the stage with introductory remarks at the Beyond Growth conference in Brussels – at the European Parliament nonetheless. It marked an important milestone for the post-growth (and degrowth) movement, and a step closer for emerge of post-growth policies.

This scenario describes a world where practices like carbon or biodiversity compensation are phased-out as their effects are considered to be too long-term for any meaningful effect. The dominating narrative of sustainability through economic growth has faltered, instead leaving place to new metrics that identify new goals. Externalities are now priced it at levels much higher than today and generational futures perspectives are longer. This makes the costs of mass-production much less desirable and business dynamics fundamentally different.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

The post-growth scenario was found to be desirable by 29% of Swedes, while 17% found it to be undesirable. As with most other scenarios, respondents found it more unlikely than likely, as 29% of Swedes rated it

as very unlikely and 11% as very likely.

Among those viewing the scenario from a skeptical perspective, common aspects cited are fear that regular citizens would be barred from movement and other rights while wealthier citizens would continue to live lavishly, difficulty to end the consumption-based lifestyles that have been created, that it is not economically feasible as growth is the imperative and that such a scenario would imply serious compromises to quality of life. Among those expressing positive views, attitudes vary from belief that society consumes too many materials today and that reduction is needed, that it is a utopic scenario, and desirable but unlikely and/or unwilling to force people into change.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

The demographic differences for this scenario are small, but there are significant differences of opinion along the political spectrum both left-right and global-national, with those leaning left and towards a global political worldview tending to regard this scenario as more desirable. Among those with a nationally oriented political worldview, this scenario is dismissed as both improbable and undesirable. Among those who consider themselves to the right, the scenario is neutral in terms of desirability, neither good nor bad, while those to the left are more in favor. Young people consider this scenario somewhat more likely than older demographics, but the age differences are small.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Over half of those who favor this scenario say they can contribute to a post-growth climate policy personally, making this one of the scenarios that is best able to activate its supporters. Conversely, over 25%



Actionable future

29% find the scenario desirable	17% find the scenario undesirable	11% find the scenario likely	29% find the scenario unlikely
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of its detractors say they are in a position to stop it from happening. On both sides of the spectrum, then, this scenario seems quite possible to influence for the average citizen, and there is a greater sense of agency with regards to a post-growth future than many other scenarios.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

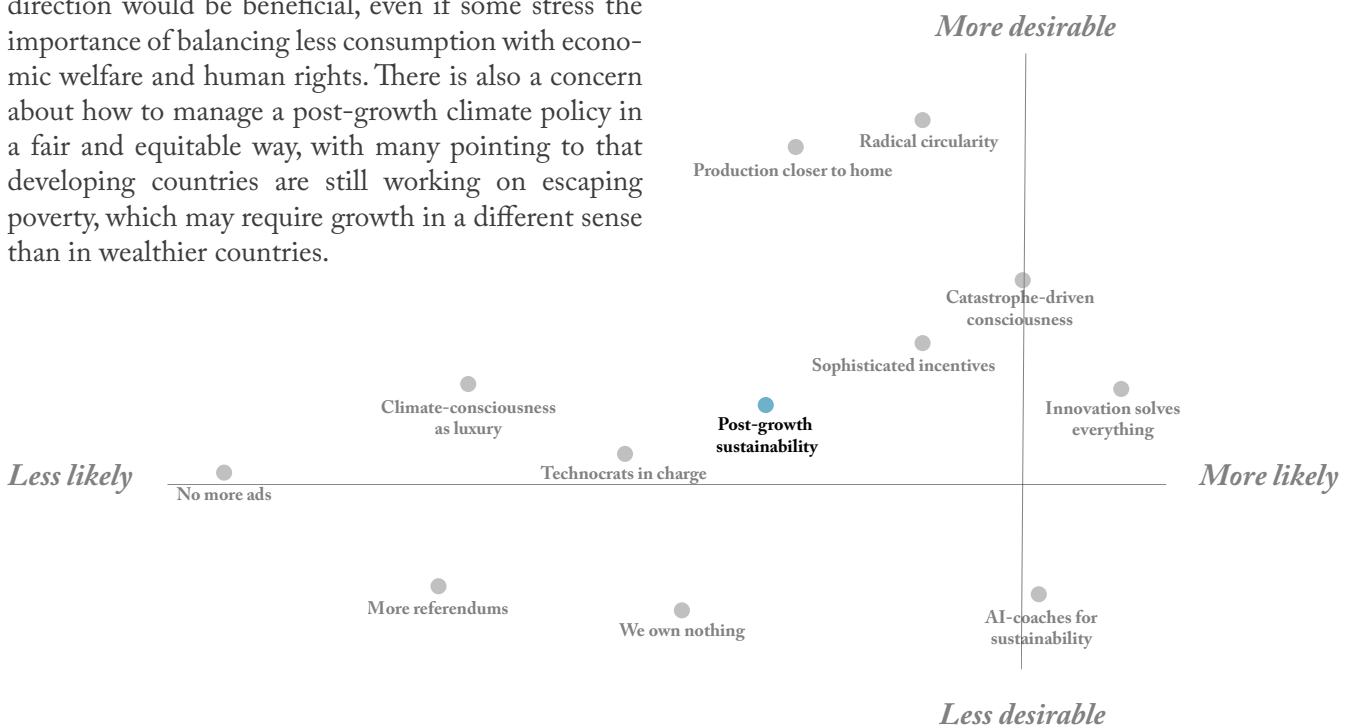
Most respondents have a fundamentally positive impression of this scenario, at least initially. Concerns arise regarding corruption and self-interested individuals, as well as the need for a global consensus to make the scenario truly matter. Though some disagree with the scenario as stated, many who are skeptical or pessimistic about it still agree that some steps in this direction would be beneficial, even if some stress the importance of balancing less consumption with economic welfare and human rights. There is also a concern about how to manage a post-growth climate policy in a fair and equitable way, with many pointing to that developing countries are still working on escaping poverty, which may require growth in a different sense than in wealthier countries.

QUOTES

“The change in this scenario requires a global consensus. Unfortunately, I believe that there is too much corruption and power-mad people for us as humanity to solve this. But hope is the last thing that leaves us I guess. But I don't think we'll solve the transition. I do what I can because I want to minimize my impact and footprint on the future environmental chaos that awaits.”

“The state will certainly take advantage of climate policy and keep the pressure on oil. Rural areas will suffer more from this than metropolitan regions. Working hours must be shortened in order to change production and consumption patterns. The treadmill can only be stopped if we say no to getting richer at the same time. We will not be able to reduce economic development because it is our only known method of improving living conditions, which is what we constantly want.”

“The world is not black and white. It is asking if we can reduce our global consumption and that we make the most of what already exists. Get rid of wear and tear, i.e. increase durability and enable repair at a reasonable cost. But punishing is not the way to go about rewarding behaviors that are desirable.”



AI-COACHES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Imagine that in 2035, there are sophisticated AI solutions in your phone that can coach your consumption in real time. For example, it automatically orders the correct amount of groceries to reduce food waste, and so you don't have to think about it further. It chooses gadgets with the best quality and longest lifespan to prevent things from breaking. The AI is also set to choose the most sustainable options for you.

This scenario describes a world in which it is not the consumer's choices that drive sustainable consumption directly – but a coaching AI that simplifies and streamlines the process of shopping sustainably. In such a world, it is easier than ever to understand the carbon emissions, materials usage, and other environmental impacts of any product you buy, but most people never have to. Instead of keeping track of all these factors and making an informed decision, the AI will simply choose sustainably for the consumer. Curious shoppers can still do their own research, but it isn't necessary to become an expert in circularity or carbon-tax policy in order to shop sustainably.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

Of all the scenarios in the study, this is the only one to be considered both on balance somewhat likely but quite undesirable. In general, the attitude is that there may be a good idea underlying the scenario, but that the accompanying surveillance and limiting of options feels threatening and constraining. Many also mention that such a coach guiding consumption might make people more passive and ignorant in their attitudes towards the environment. A fear of replacing human agency with technology is present in many free text answers, as well as a general hostility towards AI interfering in work life and personal life. Concerns about

privacy and integrity seem to be why this scenario is pushed into the category of dystopian futures.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

There is a vast gulf between the older and younger respondents with regards to this scenario. The youngest demographic (18-29 years old) consider the scenario to be both much more likely and much more desirable. Among this demographic, AI-coaches for sustainability is considered the single most likely scenario on balance, and young people are evenly split on whether it would be desirable or undesirable.

On the other hand, older demographics are both considerably more skeptical and more negatively inclined, and the oldest demographic (60+) places the scenario among the dismissed futures, considering it on balance the most undesirable of all the scenarios, and quite unlikely. Age is the clear deciding factor; gender, income, and political orientation by contrast appear to have little impact on people's attitudes to AI-coaches.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Though the scenario is overall unpopular, few believe they have any ability to stop such a future from unfolding. Of those who view the scenario as undesirable, fewer than one third (29%) say they could do anything personally to prevent this future from occurring. Though the scenario is relatively unpopular, then, few believe it will be possible for the individual consumer to influence the outcome of AI-development, either in a positive or negative direction.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

The stripping away of individual agency is the major concern cited by respondents, with surveillance and



Dystopian future

16%

find the scenario **desirable**

34%

find the scenario **undesirable**

21%

find the scenario **likely**

20%

find the scenario **unlikely**

technology-driven consumption feeling like a threat to people's choices and consumption. Many respondents also fear it would make consumers more passive and incapable of taking action for the climate in more meaningful ways, lending at best a comfortable illusion about practicing sustainable shopping.

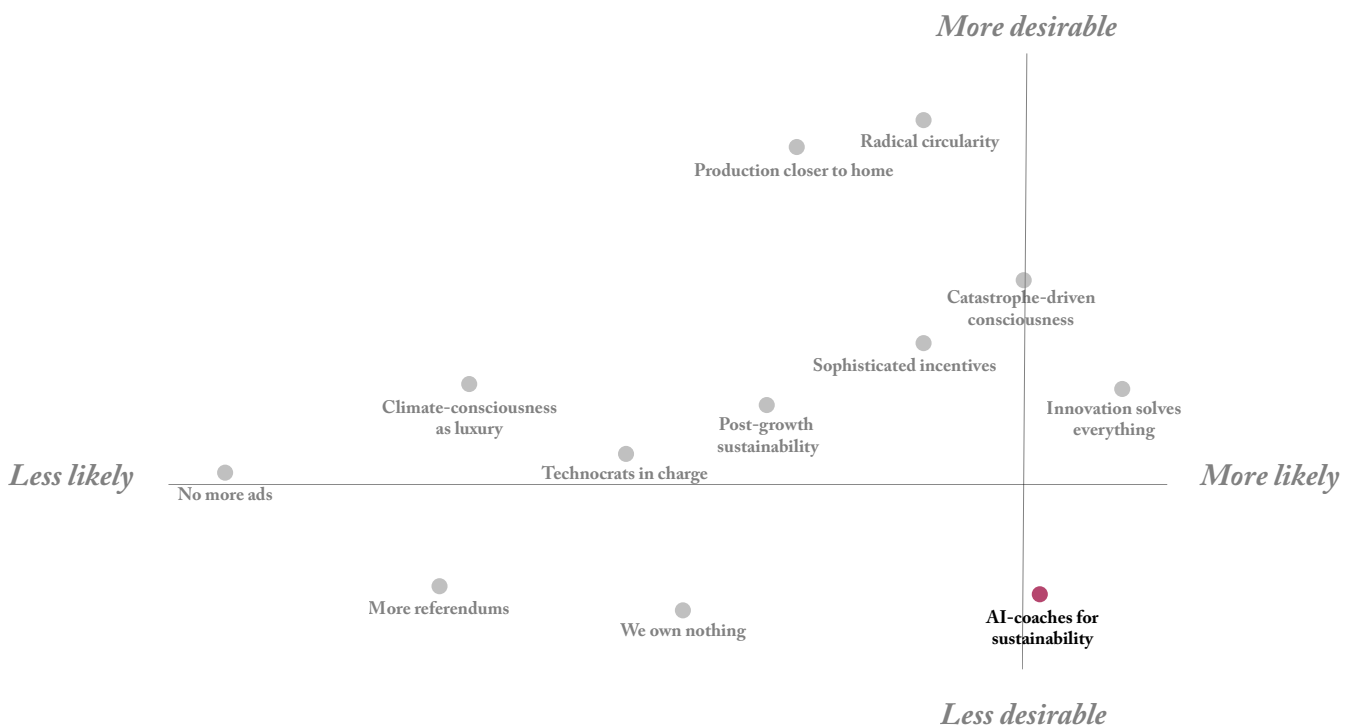
Those who see the scenario as more positive stress the importance of education accompanying such an AI-solution, indicating that it is still important for consumers to have access to the information but see it as a positive tool for making sustainability more transparent with a natural language interface.

QUOTES

"It would be good for the planet and sustainability, but it will make people even more careless and passive. With AI, the system could later be erased and people would have no education or clue about what harms the climate and what doesn't. This can result in uneducated negative decisions in other aspects of life where there isn't an AI to stop one."

"This is the scenario with the highest probability. However, it's a bit scary. As far as food waste goes, it sounds amazing. However, you still want to be in control and decide for yourself what to eat. Even if we ate 100% the best we could, we wouldn't have lived to infinity. You have to live and enjoy the world and what it offers. You have to feel in control."

"This is bound to happen. The sad thing is that consumers' decisions about consumption are being passed on to large profit-making companies that are behind the AI solutions. Unique products with quality will disappear and all consumption will become standardized."



PRODUCTION CLOSER TO HOME

Imagine that by 2035 we will have moved much of our manufacturing back to Europe, and that many products will be made close to you. Advanced components are still shipped internationally, but for example, the TV is assembled close to you, and where it is possible to use locally produced components, this is also done. In principle, all products are assembled as close to the consumer as possible at the last stage to reduce transport and supply chain vulnerability. This means that many more Swedes are working with manufacturing, repair and upgrading either in factories or on a small scale in their local area.

Here, respondents were asked to imagine a future of “re-shoring” – manufacturing brought closer to the consumer – combined with more local productions and assembly lines to reduce transport costs and environmental damage. Though closely linked to sustainability, such a scenario also touches on aspects of employment and geopolitical concerns, and as such is a scenario with many possible dimensions to consider. Core to this future is that in 2035, far more products will be made in the same market as the consumer, at least in the last stage. Specialization is still a necessary part of economic activity, but whatever work needs not be heavily specialized is shifted to be done nearer the end user.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

Though the scenario was presented in the context of a sustainability study, many respondents associated freely to other important aspects of what such a future would and could entail for them personally and for Swedish society more broadly. Aside from a positive effect for the climate, many cited employment, fewer human rights violations, and less energy spent on transporta-

tion as benefits of such a future – though many were also concerned it would lead to prices rising and products becoming more expensive. Some also considered that the positive environmental impact might be small if it did not lead to reduced usage of raw resources. Though the scenario was considered among the actionable futures, many had concerns that economic incentives, especially for large corporations, might make it more or less impossible to implement by 2035.

Of all the scenarios presented in the report, this seems the most unifying, with all demographic groups agreeing that it is a desirable, if somewhat improbable, future.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

There are few significant demographic differences with regards to this scenario – it unites respondents across the political spectrum, especially remarkable for being seen as overall positive by both those concerned with national politics and those more concerned with global issues. It is popular both with urban and rural respondents, with rural respondents being particularly positively inclined, and though those with a higher income consider the scenario slightly less likely than those with middle or low incomes, they do not consider it any less desirable. Age similarly makes no major difference. Across all demographic groups, then, the position of this future is actionable – desirable and somewhat improbable, but at least possible.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Though the scenario may be actionable for politicians and leaders, it is difficult for individuals to bring such a future about, at least according to the respondents. Fewer than half of those who wanted this future to



Actionable future

59% find the scenario desirable	5% find the scenario undesirable	12% find the scenario likely	29% find the scenario unlikely
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occur thought they could do anything to incentivize more production close to home. In the free text responses, this is also a recurring concern – it may be that it would benefit both individuals and the environment, but there is a sense that the economic forces shaping the world make it an uphill battle to make such a future happen.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

Hopes for this scenario are plentiful, both for the sake of the environment and the welfare of Sweden. Even those skeptical of this scenario were able to name potential upsides, whether economical or ecological. Especially human rights concerns were frequent, with many naming poverty in other countries, dictatorships, and exploitative supply chains. Concerns primarily included the feasibility of such a scenario, as well as what it would mean for the end consumer in terms of rising costs.

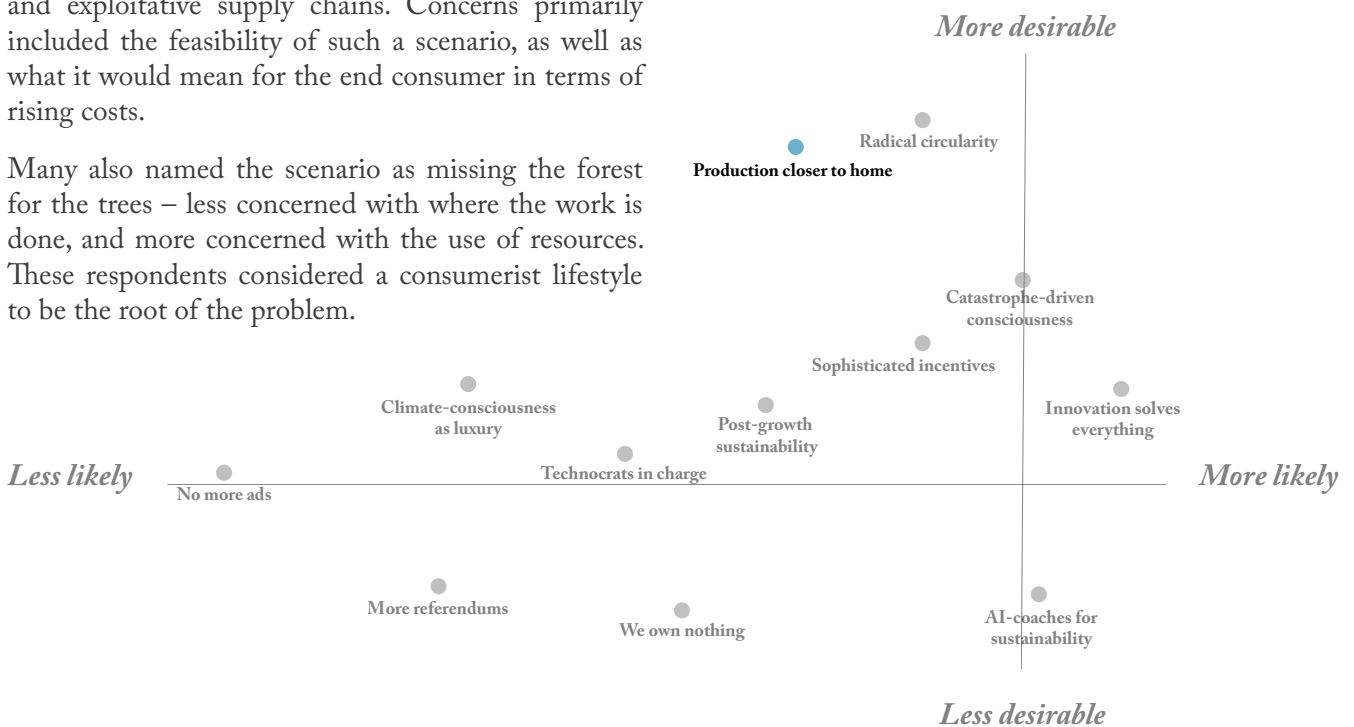
Many also named the scenario as missing the forest for the trees – less concerned with where the work is done, and more concerned with the use of resources. These respondents considered a consumerist lifestyle to be the root of the problem.

QUOTES

“Extremely unreasonable but extremely desirable scenario. Unfortunately, China is far too big and powerful, they will most likely take over the world. Everything is driven by money and we will always choose the cheapest option. But the dream would be to become more independent in every way and not import from dictatorships and great powers like China. But unfortunately, the future looks very bleak.”

“More labor and employment locally/locally creates the economy and contributes to society. Positive for smaller towns and could reduce urbanization in Sweden in the long run. However, I believe that we (society in Sweden) are so damaged by a globalist/inclusive mindset that no one goes along these lines – least of all the companies themselves.”

“Sounds a bit out of touch with reality. If the climate is to be saved, we cannot continue to consume, for example, televisions. If we don't give up our consumerist lifestyle, we won't be able to stop climate change.”



NO MORE ADS

Imagine that in 2035 there are strict bans on advertising and marketing. Advertising has not disappeared completely, but it does not occur in public places, not on TV, and not at all to the same extent online – instead, services that were previously financed by advertising have become more expensive, for example, it now costs money to have an account on social media. Advertising is almost completely gone from society, and information about products is handled by platforms that evaluate the goods from both an economic and a sustainability perspective.

This scenario describes a world in which consumption and shopping are no longer primarily guided by advertising, and in which advertisement for products is much more strictly controlled. Cutting down on where ads can be shown and limiting ad slots and ad spaces creates an environment in which advertising as we understand it today occurs far more infrequently, with fines and regulation limiting what can be advertised where. Freemium services driven by advertising are also heavily curtailed and consumers pay for information about products and services rather than being bombarded with information for free, creating a business model for the Internet that does not need to rely on ads to the same extent.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

This scenario is considered, out of all the scenarios presented, to be the most outlandish and impossible. Of all the futures presented, none was more unlikely, placing this scenario far into the category of distant futures. Though many regard ads as a nuisance, concerns about inequality, limited choices for consumers, and difficulties for smaller businesses to survive without ads mean this scenario is not seen as very desirable. Advertisements seem to be considered by most a necessary evil,

with enough benefits that they fill some useful role in society. Even to those who wish for all advertisements to be banished from public spaces, most feel that such a policy would be impossible to implement in practice. Those who do not wish for this scenario to occur often cite advertisements as an equalizing force in society – allowing smaller companies to communicate their products and services on more equal footing and allowing poorer citizens to participate in public discourse through ad-driven media.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

All demographics regard this scenario as extremely unlikely. However, older respondents were much more likely to see it as desirable. To the oldest demographic, an ad-free future would be a good thing bringing freedom from a cluttered information space. Younger respondents, perhaps more used to the media environment, were less inclined to say that such a change would be positive, and the group aged 18-29 describe the scenario as both impossible and undesirable, dismissing it altogether. Concerns cited among this demographic were that a world without ads would be more unequal, more expensive, and less easy to navigate. Politically, there were no differences at all in attitudes to this scenario, indicating that at present advertisements in and of themselves are not a divisive issue.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Most respondents had somewhat mixed opinions on this scenario, with few inclined to describe it as strongly negative or strongly positive. Consequently, few saw the scenario as actionable in any sense of the word, feeling very little individual responsibility for either driving or preventing such a scenario. Only 12% and 6% respectively were inclined to personally put in any



Distant future

25% find the scenario desirable	23% find the scenario undesirable	5% find the scenario likely	61% find the scenario unlikely
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work to either bring about or prevent this scenario.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

Advertisements are cited as a nuisance and as something contributing to stress and irritation in daily life, as well as spurring on unnecessary consumption. The benefits of this scenario were often regarded as primarily emotional – getting away from the fast-paced bombardment of information and advertisement in the modern age.

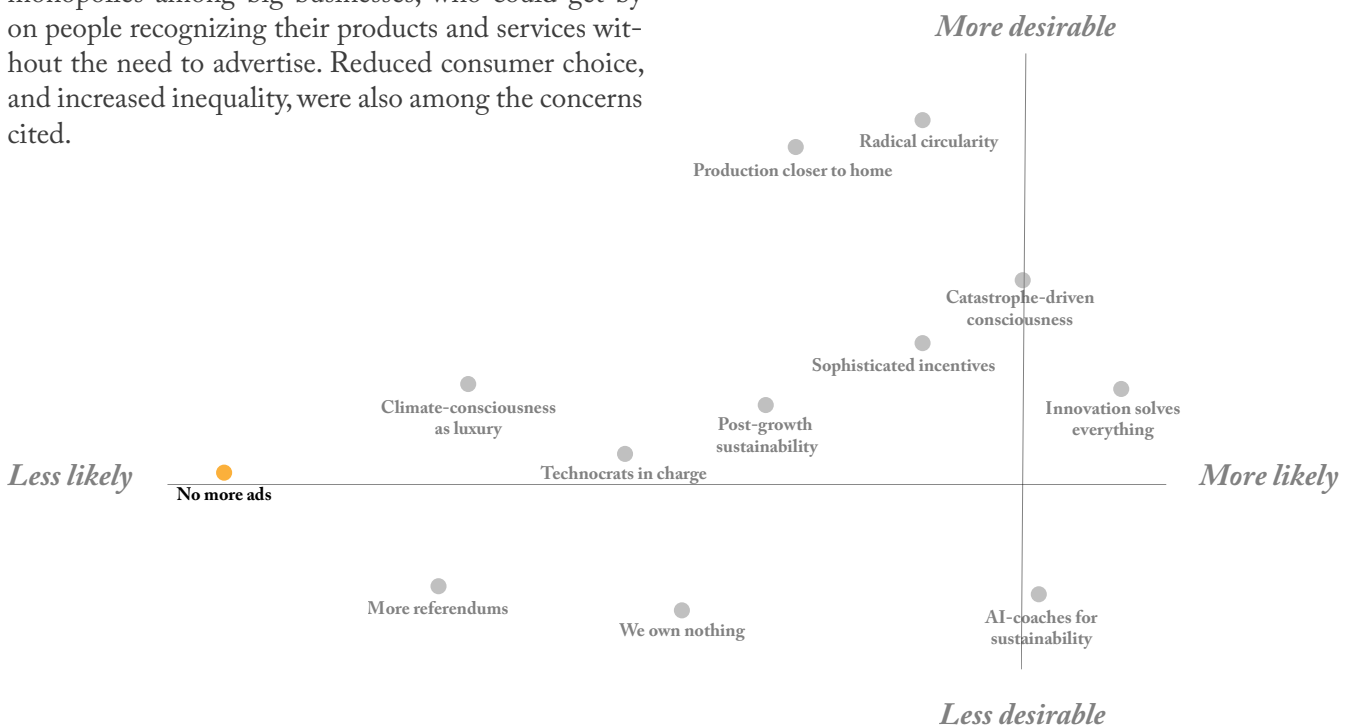
The concerns are more practical and diverse, primarily concerning the infeasibility of outlawing advertising without heavily limiting free speech in general. Many also worry that this scenario would strengthen monopolies among big businesses, who could get by on people recognizing their products and services without the need to advertise. Reduced consumer choice, and increased inequality, were also among the concerns cited.

QUOTES

“Desirable, extremely desirable! I HATE advertising in all its forms. I HATE all the disgusting popups on all websites and all the disgusting advertising in the feeds, on billboards, on TV, on websites, in games, at the cinema, etc. I would have felt much better in a world that was ad-free. But it’s a pipe dream, it will never happen.”

“I myself like advertising in the right amount and believe that some use of social media is good for most people. A future like this can be exclusionary and class differences can become clear who can afford to be social or not.”

“Could happen, but my personal view of advertising is that at moderate levels, it’s good to stop and realize that you’ve wasted a lot of time sitting with social media instead of being present in the real world. In addition, advertising makes you keep track of various brands and the like, which helps in social situations. Spending more money on social media might reduce the number of people using it (or not, that’s up to the evidence) but it will definitely mean that those who still use it will use it more. Because nothing interferes with their scrolling and they’ve spent money so they want to have an outlet for their spending.”



WE OWN NOTHING

Imagine that by 2035, it has become the norm that basically everything you use is offered through a service provider. You rent or lease car, sports equipment, electronics, and clothes. The result of this is that you own very little and rely entirely on full-service delivery to ensure that your needs are met. The subscriptions always include, among other things, repairs and replacement of faulty products. Everything lasts a long time, and the quality of the rented products is extremely high, which saves money both for you and for the companies that rent them out.

In this world, ownership has been drastically reduced and replaced with services. These business models incentivize making products that last over products that wear out and need replacing, since it is the provider who is responsible for the quality and durability of the products. Hypothetically, then, it might lead to reduced consumption of products and materials without impacting what is available to consumers, especially since such a model also incentivizes sharing items that are used less frequently. The sharing- and subscription model means both that more people can use the same products, and that there is an incentive to make products more durable and higher-quality.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

This scenario was on balance considered undesirable. Of all scenarios in the study, this scenario had the fewest describing it as a positive future, with the majority expressing a neutral sentiment. Though respondents considered the increase of service models in the future to be likely, the idea that by 2035 such business models are the norm was seen as very unlikely by a plurality of the respondents, so this scenario was overall considered both unlikely and undesirable on balance. This places the scenario among the dismissed futures,

considered “not a concern” by most respondents. Some think it might reduce consumption but also reduce consumer options and overall welfare, while others suspect it would actually increase the amount of waste in the economy overall. The emotional attachment to ones’ personal possessions is a significant reason behind both the skepticism to how likely the scenario is, and the view of it as largely undesirable.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Rural respondents were far more likely to dismiss this scenario than those in cities. Among respondents on the countryside or in smaller towns, the scenario is both more undesirable and more unlikely. Those in the three largest cities (Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö) leaned more neutral about the scenario, but still on balance dismiss the scenario. The biggest divide regarding this scenario, though was political, with those who consider national issues their top priority being very negatively inclined; in this demographic, this scenario was listed as by far the most undesirable. Globally-inclined respondents, on the other hand, considered the scenario more or less neutral in terms of desirability.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Though very few people viewed this scenario as desirable, those who do considered it quite actionable; more than half thought they could contribute to making such a future happen. Conversely, though, of the larger group who wished to prevent such a scenario, one-third think it would be possible for them to stop it from happening. This scenario, then, has a high amount of agency both from those who like and dislike it, possibly because it relies on consumers switching to subscription models over simply purchasing products.



Dismissed future

14%

find the scenario **desirable**

34%

find the scenario **undesirable**

8%

find the scenario **likely**

32%

find the scenario **unlikely**

HOPES AND CONCERNS

A loss of personal integrity and control over one's own possessions is the primary concern. Most people state that they want to own their own possessions, not rent them. For cheaper products, many question whether such a business model would be practical, and think it seems applicable mostly to more expensive products (like cars and homes). There are some potential benefits for the environments, though the ability to choose what is done via the subscription model and what is simply purchased is a strong sticking point.

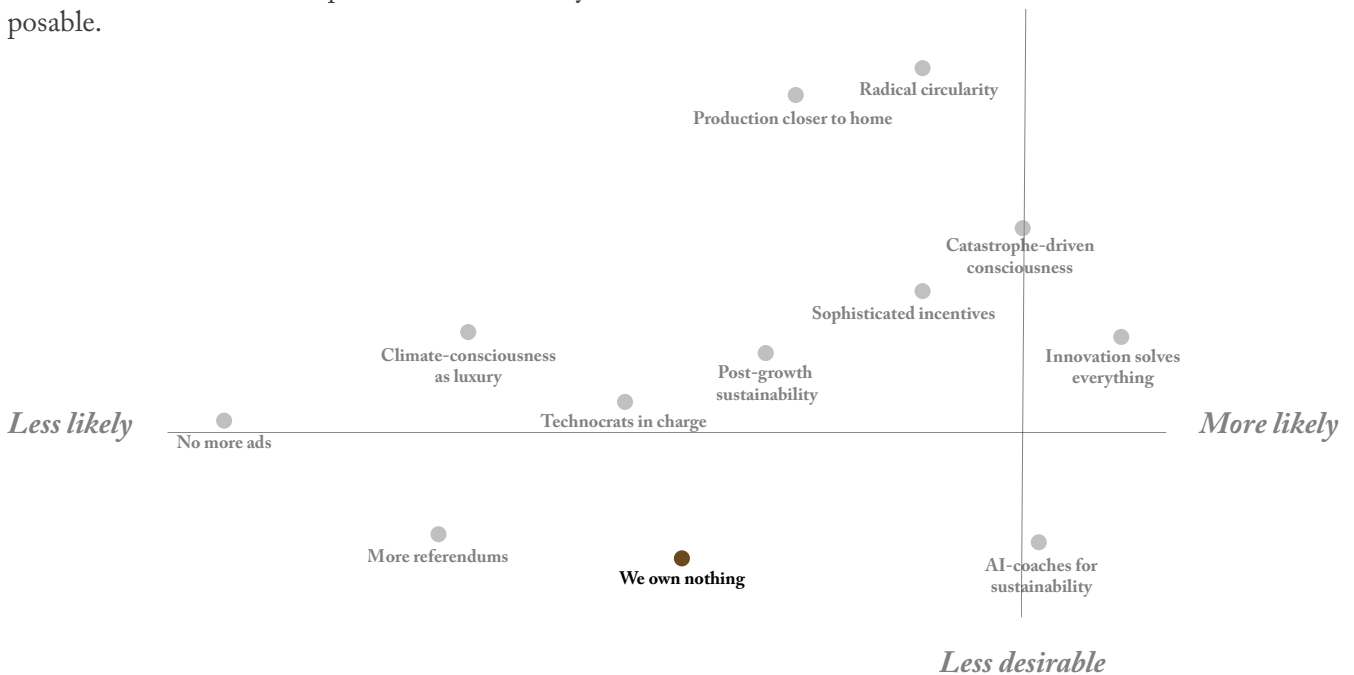
Many also wonder whether this would have any net positive impact on the climate at all, or whether subscription models would simply mask the problem of overconsumption to "behind the scenes", where businesses would still treat the products as essentially disposable.

QUOTES

"I've seen the trend of borrowing things become big. But I hate it to be honest. As a person who has a hard time finding clothes that fit, I think that borrowing clothes is completely unreasonable. In a world like this where everything is also made to suit a certain group of people, it feels like you are easily excluded. Then people are good at breaking electronics and how easy will it be to complain/repair? Not at all probably, but you have to pay for breaking in the 'wrong way'. Cars and the like, I can definitely see, everyone doesn't need to have a car all the time, but having to borrow a console kind of like borrowing a book from the library just because I want to play video games sounds unreasonable."

"This sounds awesome in theory! However, not likely. The idea of doing it for the environment is super. However, you take worse care of things that are not 100% yours. Or that people have different levels of ability to take care of or return something as they received it. But if it was a company that serviced the products, you could have fined people who didn't behave. Like the idea but hard to implement. Also easier to implement than many other scenarios."

"The scheme will benefit wealthy and careless consumers. The wear-and-tear behavior will grow and thus more production of products than necessary. In addition, everything will become more expensive as consumers will constantly be lured to a more expensive subscription or lease."



MORE REFERENDUMS

Imagine that in 2035, the environmental issue has been moved from politicians and experts to the people in the form of referendums. The climate initiatives are decided by a majority vote among people in the country, where sufficiently popular initiatives are implemented, and less popular climate plans are voted down. Experts formulate the proposals and are interviewed in the media, but they are not ultimately the ones who decide which plans are put into action or not, but only the popular climate proposals become law.

This scenario imagines a radical democratization of the climate issue, bringing sustainability directly to the voters in the form of climate referendums. In this scenario, all climate directives are decided by the people, though proposals are put forward by various policymakers. Climate policy in such a scenario would be anchored in the “will of the people”, though a majority vote is no guarantee a significant minority would not oppose the directive. The scenario is agnostic whether or not other policy areas (outside of sustainability) would be subject to the same rule of referendum.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

Overall, this scenario was considered both undesirable and unlikely, with most respondents distancing themselves from such a future. It is considered a dismissed future of little consequence by most, and a common sentiment is that a pivot to referendums would not meaningfully be an improvement over the current system. The scenario is described by many as radical, and without a clear justification. Of all the scenarios, this is the one that sees the lowest combination of desirability and likelihood. With little popular support, then, this scenario appears very unlikely to happen by 2035, especially given the nature of the scenario.

No particular political leaning is more likely than any other to be in favor of this scenario, and demographic differences are overall small, making skepticism of this scenario a surprisingly unified opinion, with little to no polarization.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Demographic differences are overall small, and the scenario finds support among no particular demographic. Some are more dismissive than others, however, with high income earners being particularly negative both in terms of likelihood and desirability, describing the scenario as both extremely undesirable and very unlikely. The youngest demographic, aged 18-29, is the only demographic group that is somewhat neutral on the scenario in terms of desirability, placing it still as more undesirable than desirable, but by a smaller margin. However, young people also consider the scenario overwhelmingly unlikely and even among this group, it is the second most improbable scenario. Interestingly, political opinion does not seem to impact the opinion of this scenario very much.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Even among those few who do consider this scenario an overall possibility, fewer than half think they would be able to contribute to making such an outcome occur. This, combined with the scenario scoring low on desirability, makes it the least actionable scenario of all – only 6% of respondents state a willingness to contribute to such a scenario. Conversely, 9% of all respondents in the survey say they would personally take action to stop this scenario from occurring.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

Most express a concern that ordinary people lack the



Dismissed future

15%

find the scenario **desirable**

31%

find the scenario **undesirable**

5%

find the scenario **likely**

46%

find the scenario **unlikely**

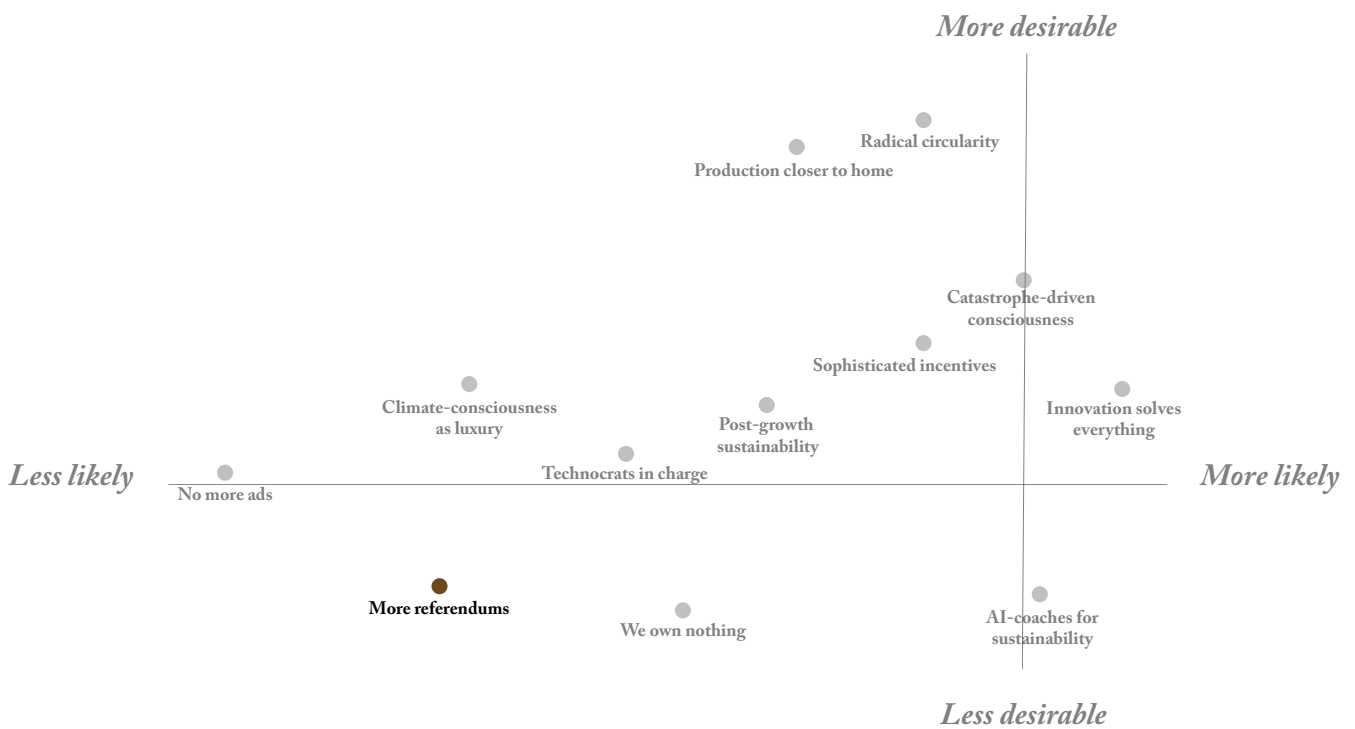
knowledge and foresight to be able to meaningfully vote directly on such proposals, and many are also concerned about the impact of propaganda and media influence on the general voting public. Many also express a worry that without more structure underlying a system of referendums, it would be impossible to drive a long-term strategy for a green transition. A few hope that this would help democratically anchor sustainability decisions among the people.

QUOTES

"Direct democracy does not work. What is popular can never stabilize politics because what is popular varies. The situation today means that a few are heard and those who make the most noise seem to be in the majority. Attempts at referendums have shown time and time again that they are populist and predictable."

"If it is simply a question of opting for environmental initiative No. 1 or 2, where both options have a positive effect, I think that could be feasible and have some kind of positive impact on the sense of ownership of those who voted for the winning option. But I definitely think it's more effective to set workable consequences for certain behaviors that you want to increase or decrease in the population."

"In a way, it's good that the people get to have a say in the decision-making. BUT! Unfortunately, there are people who are not serious and how can you trust that it will really be good?"



TECHNOCRATS IN CHARGE

Imagine that in 2035, it will have become the knowledge of experts that forms the basis for most decisions about the climate. Important legislation that is considered to have good expert support does not need to be voted through in the Riksdag, but is adopted automatically, with the requirement to be clearly supported by data and facts. More climate decisions are made by researchers and specially appointed officials, and politicians rarely or never need to be asked about the subject.

This scenario imagines a world of technocratic government in which climate policy is unmoored from the usual political processes and given a speedier path to implementation. Whether or not other important fields would be touched by this transformation is left unsaid, but in such a scenario climate policy becomes a matter that is allowed to sidestep usual democratic processes. A world guided by experts naturally faces questions of the selection process of these experts and technocrats, which is not outlined in the scenario itself and indeed something that troubles many of the respondents.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

This scenario is considered unlikely and on balance neither desirable nor undesirable. Most cite concerns over practical implementations, wondering how experts would be selected for, and the chief recurring concern is accountability – who would be responsible for the decisions made by these experts, and what would be the safeguards against corruption and self-interest? The need for democratic processes are stressed by many, even though there are also some who see the value in such a system for issues of utmost urgency and importance. Overall, regardless of whether respondents find this outcome positive or negative, most

consider that the practical hurdles to getting such a system in place are so great that this outcome is very unlikely and there probably is no great appetite in the near future to make a transition to technocratic climate policy a reality.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Women consider this scenario on balance to be desirable, while men are neutral on the subject, making this one of the few scenarios with a significant (if small) difference between male and female respondents. But by far the biggest demographic difference is age, where young people see this scenario as an actionable future, desirable and only somewhat unlikely to happen. Among the group aged 18-29, it is seen as much more likely. Taken together, then, young women as a demographic are much more likely to be in support of this scenario, and older men much less likely.

Political concerns also factor into the scenario to some extent, with those who hold global concerns as most important being more in favor of the scenario than those who focus on national issues.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Few people see any ability to influence such an outcome, perhaps because the scenario hinges precisely on experts and trained professionals taking charge of the sustainability transition. As such, this scenario is seen as difficult for ordinary people to influence, whether it is regarded as positive or negative. Only 11% state they could or would personally help bring about such a scenario.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

Many are concerned that the experts in charge may



Distant future

28%

find the scenario
desirable

23%

find the scenario
undesirable

7%

find the scenario
likely

34%

find the scenario
unlikely

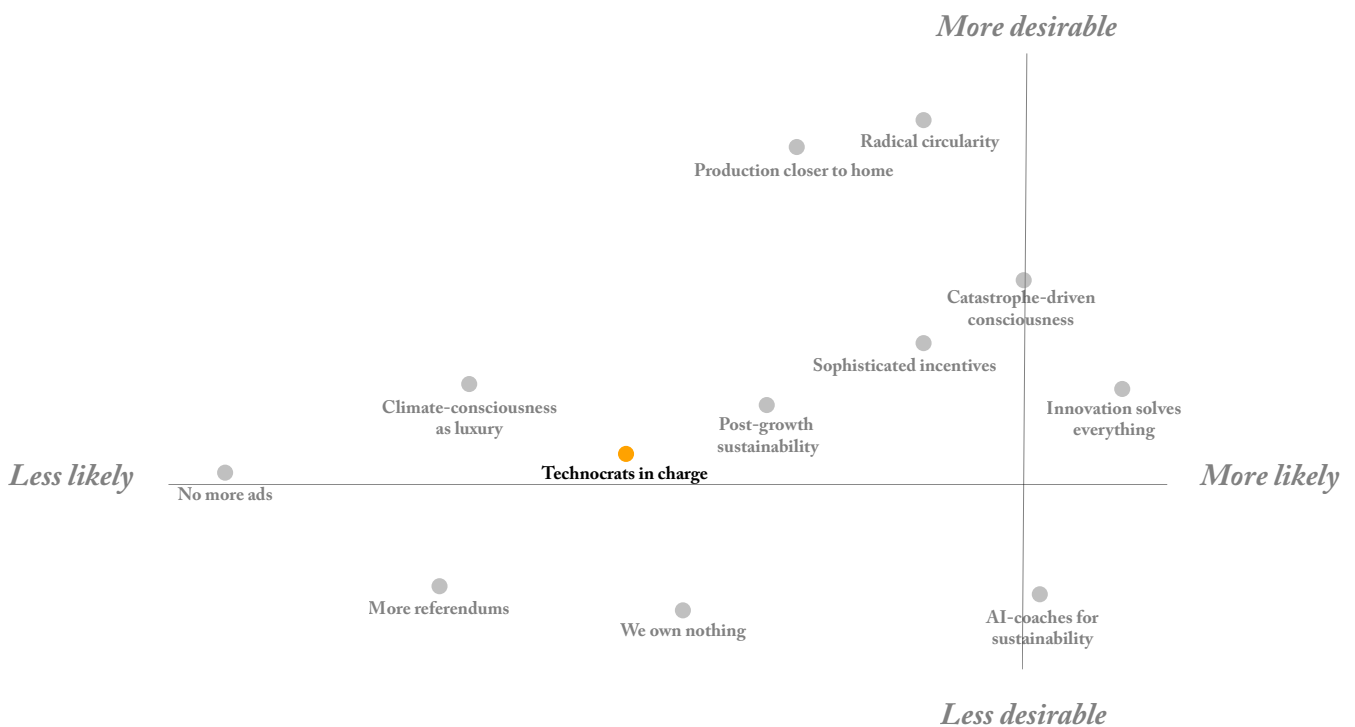
have agendas other than sustainability, and that there will be insufficient checks and balances on the power of those determining sustainability policies. Some also feel that experts and researchers lack integrity and can be easily bribed or influenced by other actors. A commonly recurring concern, likewise, is the skepticism towards if simple solutions really exist or if sustainability policy must be balanced against economic and societal issues, which renders the possibility of putting sustainability experts in charge less feasible. Those who are positively inclined speak of hopes that such a scenario might at least make sustainability policies carry greater weight and be easier to implement.

QUOTES

"I think the experts have the best knowledge of what needs to be done, but it also has to fit the big picture and the big plan. Environmental changes must work in tandem with other changes taking place in society. Shutting down and changing one thing has knock-on effects, so I don't think things can happen in silos. However, if it can be proven that it works together with other legislation in society as a whole and that all the consequences have been carefully considered, I would have preferred it that experts should be allowed to decide on that part of the budget."

"Good suggestions, but this also assumes that researchers are not 'bought' and have their own agenda, as can be seen in several different areas in the past. See, for example, research such as sun protection, radiation, the environment and others. How can you, as a member of the public, trust the experts? They can say what they want without question. Who's going to review them? At the same time, it is a better proposal than some others in this survey. Provided you hire the right researcher."

"In the pharmaceutical industry, there are unfortunately far too many studies presented by researchers who are linked to various companies in the industry. Independent researchers, regardless of what they are researching, are hard to find."



INNOVATION SOLVES EVERYTHING

Imagine that in 2035, technology has become the focus of solving the climate issue. Governments and companies around the world have shifted their focus towards investing in technology-based solutions such as carbon capture and new materials that require fewer resources. There is no longer a greater focus on consuming less and taking more responsibility in the climate debate, but rather a focus on gearing up innovation and working more with technology-based solutions to climate problems.

This scenario serves as a counterpoint to many other scenarios presented in the survey, in that it emphasizes innovation and technological transformation over societal transformation. In this scenario, technology has become the focus for governments worldwide and massive investments in research and development underpin the answers to the climate crisis. The debate as such has shifted to a policy level occurring far above the heads of most private citizens, much as in the scenario of technocrats in charge.

In this scenario, lifestyles are not heavily affected, though the priorities of society may shift as governments need to invest more money into a green transition, leaving a challenge of resource management for politicians and policymakers.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

Of all the scenarios in the study, this is the only one considered both on balance clearly feasible and clearly desirable by the respondents. Most had no strong opinions on the scenario, but of those who did, more respondents were inclined to rate this as a hopeful future, a positive outcome that seems probable. Only the very oldest in the survey expressed a skepticism towards green technology as a driver of climate policy in the

future. In general, looking to the free-text answers, this scenario is considered a necessary but probably not sufficient component of a sustainable future, with many calling for societal and lifestyle changes accompanying the technological transition – but very few dismissed a technology-driven green transition out of hand.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

All but the oldest demographics find this scenario more or less likely to occur, with only the oldest group, 60+, rating this scenario as more likely than unlikely. The very oldest are more skeptical about technology solving the climate crisis, differing sharply compared to even the group aged 50-59. The only other group to find the scenario unlikely are those on the lowest income, who rate it as more or less equally likely and unlikely. One other demographic difference of note is the political spectrum: Those who self-identify as on the political right are more likely to find the scenario likely, while those who self-identify as belonging to the left find the scenario neutral in terms of probability, neither likely nor unlikely.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

This scenario is considered both likely and desirable, but largely out of the people's hands. Fewer than half of respondents who want the scenario to occur think that they can contribute, seeing it as largely in the hands of researchers and innovators, and despite being both popular and likely, only about 13% of respondents indicate they could and would contribute to creating such a future. A negligible amount of respondents, only 2%, would personally contribute to stopping this scenario, though, making it among the least opposed scenarios on a personal level.



Hopeful future

27%	11%	20%	13%
find the scenario desirable	find the scenario undesirable	find the scenario likely	find the scenario unlikely

HOPES AND CONCERNS

Most respondents see technological development as a necessary but not sufficient component of achieving a sustainable future. Technology will be needed to bring about a more sustainable community, but many express concern that this future scenario leaves out other important aspects of environmental care, such as lifestyle changes and less consumerism. Many also find it risky to depend on technology that does not exist yet for a problem that seems urgent and immediate. Those who are positively inclined towards this scenario generally see it as probable or even inevitable in the long run, with technological development being motivated by the climate crisis and consider it likely innovators will respond to these pressures and incentives.

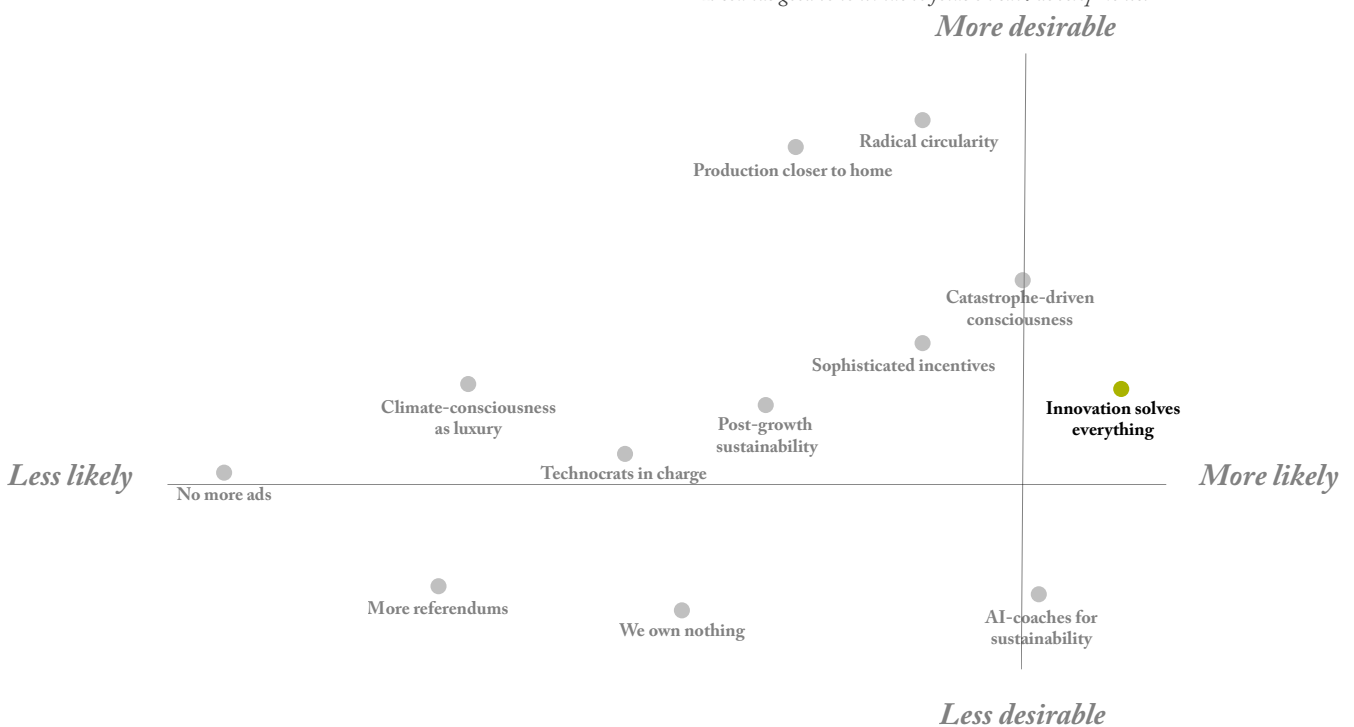
QUOTES

"Sounds like a very reasonable guess. I also think this way of working would be far more effective than one with a focus on restraint. Society is constantly looking forward and will not stop by itself, especially not for such a thing that feels so abstract and far away to many. However, innovation that leads development in the right direction would happily be embraced by the population and do much more good for the environment in the process."

"Doubtful, it has so far not been successful. In Sweden, we can look back on fuels with the methanol hype that was followed by gas - both flopped. I am also skeptical about hydrogen and batteries that are being advocated in the iron ore industry and electric car manufacturing. Batteries are a dirty affair until they are used but also after they no longer work."

"As long as it affects the climate better than today's ideas, that's fine, but I think it takes so much to reduce environmental pollution that it would be best to invest in both parts in parallel instead."

"Any kind of technological development is good, we have already seen in the years that have been with the technological advances in environmental management. It sounds good to continue to focus on such developments."



CLIMATE CONSCIOUSNESS AS LUXURY

Imagine that in 2035 it will be possible to manufacture high-end products that have high quality and low environmental impact. Those who can afford it shop and travel in an environmentally friendly way, which has grown significantly in status. More environmentally friendly alternatives are more expensive but also more desirable and the rich in society boast of their low carbon emissions. High-income earners spend their money on taking care of the planet. For example, billionaires and celebrities now travel by train instead of private jets, and the very richest contribute to climate change almost not at all because they can afford the most sustainable solutions.

This scenario envisions climate consciousness as a luxury, something practiced by the wealthiest members of society. In this future, the transition to a greener economy is spearheaded by the wealthiest who can afford such solutions, paving the way for others to copy their behavior and consumption patterns. Ecological and sustainable products hold a high quality, but are often quite expensive, meaning high income earners become the first to adopt climate neutral lifestyles through a combination of innovation and new societal norms that reward sustainable consumption and views it as linked to status and desirability.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

This future is considered quite unlikely, though overall desirable. Most consider it to be positive if the wealthy members of society take on more responsibility for the environment, though many respondents also stress that such a move would not be sufficient for lasting, wide-reaching impact as the wealthier members of society constitute only a very small portion of the population. There are also concerns about equality, and very few thought that this scenario was anything they

themselves could do anything about. All in all, it seems like a future that might be a desirable outcome in conjunction with other changes or improvements in sustainability policy, but it is very difficult to consciously bring such a transition about.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Rural respondents were very prone to rating this scenario as unlikely, relative to urban respondents who still deem it unlikely, but not completely impossible. The greatest division demographically, however, is seen in the age range between the oldest and the youngest, with the demographic 18-39 regarding the scenario as much more desirable than older respondents, and also more probable. Seen to the youngest demographic alone, this scenario might be counted among the actionable futures. In terms of politics, those with national concerns considered the scenario more unlikely than those with global concerns – though all demographics except for the very youngest ultimately consider this future very distant and difficult to achieve.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Few respondents viewed this scenario as one where they could actively contribute themselves, with only 13% rating it as something they thought could be brought about by their own actions. Only 3% thought such a future was something they would work to prevent from happening, meaning that overall, most people see this scenario as being out of the hands of ordinary citizens, attributing this future mostly to the actions of the very rich and powerful.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

While the idea of high income earners contributing more to solving the climate crisis was generally viewed



Distant future

35%

find the scenario
desirable

18%

find the scenario
undesirable

10%

find the scenario
likely

49%

find the scenario
unlikely

as positive, many find the scenario somewhat unequal, consigning the poorer members of society to less healthy, less sustainable lifestyles. Greater divides between rich and poor are a common concern. Hopes are that famous people choosing more sustainable options might act as inspiration for society more broadly, pushing the general populace towards more sustainable behaviors.

A chief concern is that if only the rich change their habits, only small effects might be effected upon the climate since they constitute a small minority of the population. Many also find it very unlikely that the rich and powerful members of society would change their habits to begin with.

QUOTES

"We all want to be able to afford sustainable solutions. Otherwise, they will be excluded from society. But celebrities travelling by train would have saved the climate as they can make their followers want to do the same. In this way, public transport would become more important. But think like this: Offer everyone in Sweden free public transport. This reduces emissions. People are also finding work in these occupations and unemployment is decreasing."

"Very likely scenario. There are several signs that this is going to be the case. I remember when in California it cost more to buy a used Toyota Prius compared to ordering a new one. The rich families on the street wanted to show that they could afford to buy a Toyota Prius and at the same time not burden their conscience with consumption that burdens the climate."

"The very richest need to be where they need to be and influence and invest and do what they do best because it helps the rest of the economy to move. Their travel habits contribute an insignificant part to the climate problems, instead it is the masses that cause our pollution."

"It will lead to unrest in the poor countries as they will never be able to afford to buy more than the rubbish that the richer countries reject as everything environmentally friendly will be far too expensive for them."



CONCLUSIONS

This report began with the work of creating a broad range of scenarios, narrowed down to twelve possible futures then tested against the general public in the form of a survey. Distilling these twelve scenarios down into the most desirable ones, we end up with four **actionable** and two **hopeful** futures, all six of which taken together paint a picture of the kind of sustainable future that should have broad popular support. Naturally, no scenario on its own can fully illustrate the future, but through the lens of these four scenarios, an image of a possible sustainable future begins to appear.

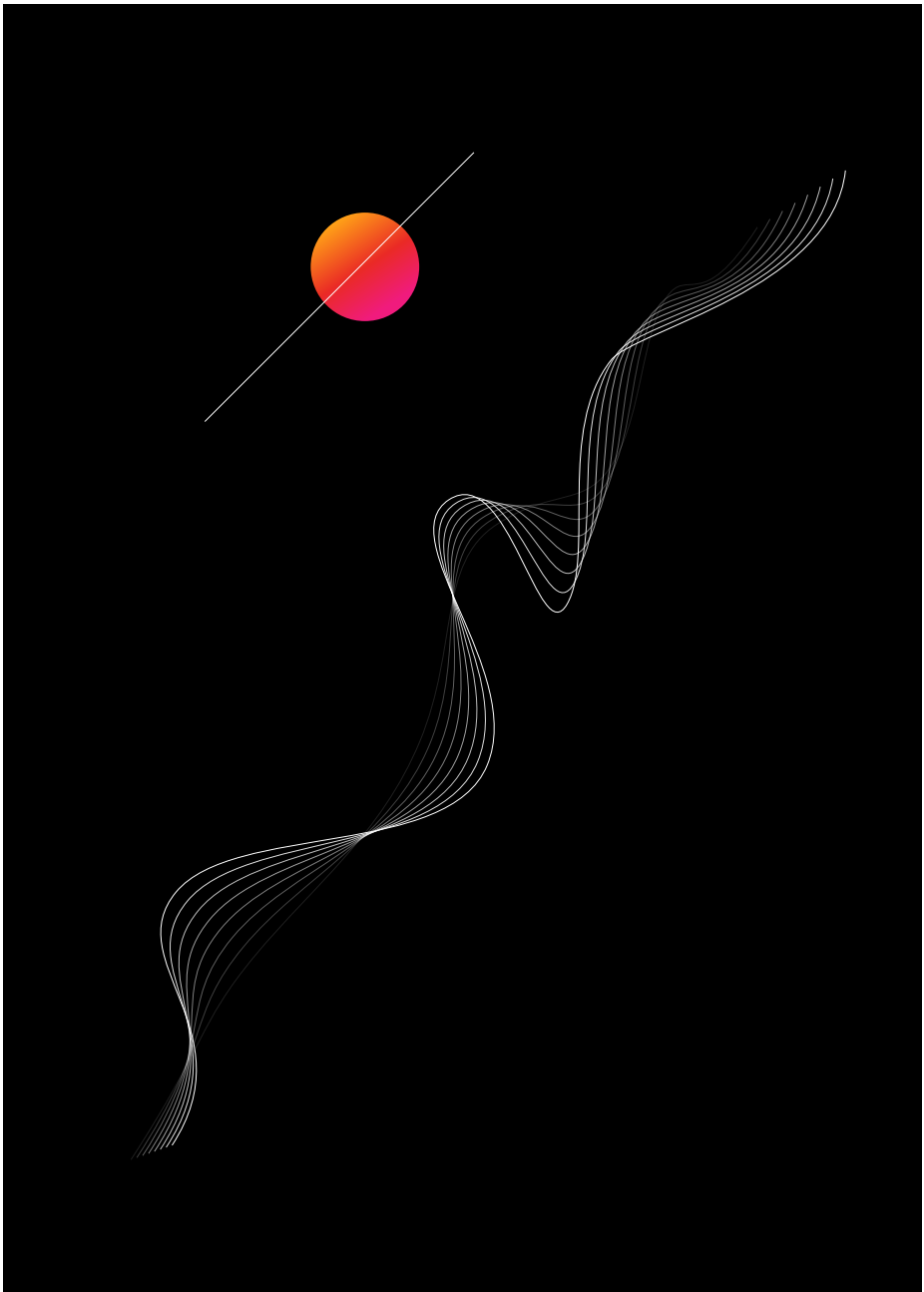
Firstly, the **hopeful** futures present a kind of base scenario for the future. These are futures that seem like bright, likely futures at the moment, and taken together they describe a future in which climate disasters bring about more unified actions from governments around the world to address the climate crisis more directly, creating the incentives for coordinated action. However, given the other hopeful future scenario, such coordinated action is likely to be oriented primarily around innovation and research – in other words, the hopeful futures illustrate a world in which research initiatives worldwide are strengthened, but in which lifestyle and consumption is not necessarily altered.

But this may change. The **actionable** futures illustrate complements to this disaster-driven climate conscious world of technology and innovation, in which four more components can be made part of the global initiative for sustainability. Firstly, the post-growth scenario indicates that in the wealthier world, at least, there is some appetite for lowering consumption and scaling down the growth-oriented mindset. Production can be lessened, and in many cases, brought closer to home in reshoring initiatives that reduce the costs of transportation, even at the cost of some rising prices given

the attitudes towards a post-growth world of lowered consumption overall. Sophisticated incentives may be brought to bear to push a reduction of consumerism in this direction. Lastly, the world of radical circularity tells us that there is room and strong support for more advanced forms of recycling and reuse.

A combination of the hopeful and actionable futures, then, illustrates a world in which technology-driven innovation is spurred on by **disaster-driven consciousness**, uniting policymakers in implementing new solutions. Some of these solutions could include **radical circularity** and re-use and recycling of key materials, **more local production** of goods and services reducing transportation costs by bringing peoples' needs closer to where they live. Moreover, under this agenda there would be **sophisticated incentives** encouraging more sustainable lifestyles and consumption, which enables a **post-growth paradigm** at least in part. Even if consumption cannot be scaled down all the way to "true" post-growth, such initiatives can be complementary of and strengthen the case for sustainability in a future where it becomes an ever growing and more certain concern, nationally for Sweden as well as globally.





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REPORT LAYOUT

Kairos Future

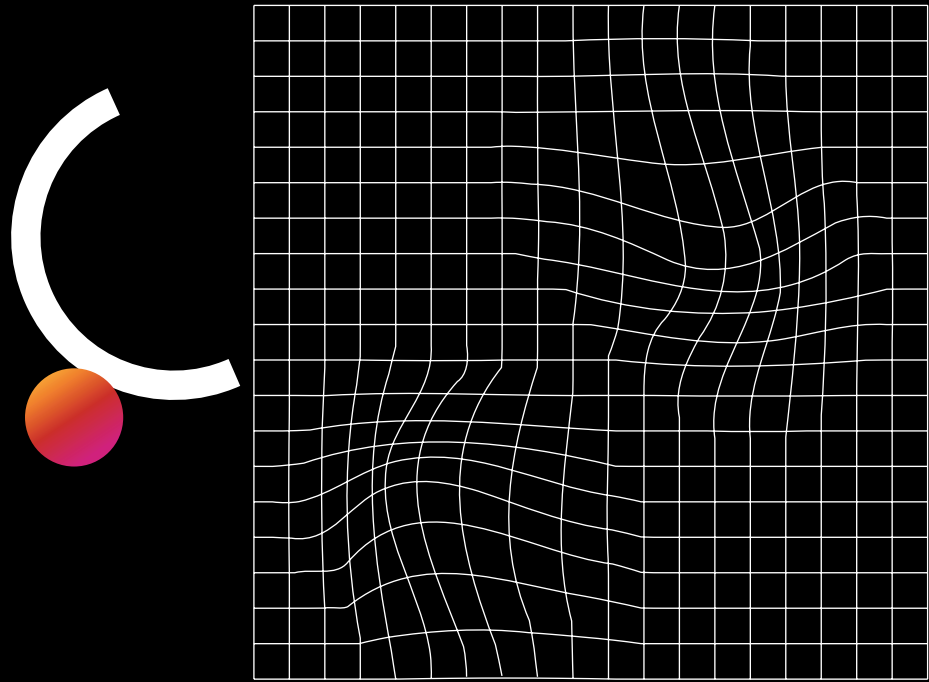
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Science Park Borås and Kairos Future hope that this report can become one of the tools for (re)shaping the future.

Futures that today seem far-fetched, are evidently not as far away as we might think. The world has changed immensely during the past two generations and will probably do so for the two next ones as well. Having the visions are what will lead us in the right direction.





KAIROS FUTURE

Kairos Future is an international consulting and research company that helps companies understand and shape their future. Through trend analysis, innovation, strategy, and software support for AI-driven analytics, we help our clients turn big picture insights into concrete action. Founded in 1993, Kairos Future is headquartered in Stockholm and has offices and partners around the world.



Science Park Borås is an innovation environment where ideas become reality. It operates internationally, nationally and regionally with textiles and fashion, social development and sustainable consumption. Collaboration between companies, academia, public and non-profit actors provides strength in the work with circular business models where design, materials longevity and sustainable materials circulation are central. Science Park Borås at the University of Borås supports companies in textiles and fashion on behalf of the Swedish government and is also funded by the EU, Vinnova and the Västergötaland Region, among others.