European Research Area

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

Emerging Visions for Future Sustainable Lifestyles.

Preliminary policy considerations from the SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 European Social Platform project. Developing pathways to more sustainable living.

First Policy Brief, February 2012

INTRODUCTION

Societal innovation is vital to drive significant changes in the ways that we currently live if we are to increase quality of life for all while reducing the negative environmental and social impacts of human activity. Creativity is needed to achieve the widespread changes that will shift current unsustainable lifestyle trends, and that will provide resilient support systems and infrastructure to make difficult changes easier.

Sustainable lifestyles refer to patterns of behaviour shaped by personal and social interactions that are influenced by environmental, cultural technological and socio-economic contexts. Lifestyles that support future sustainable societies will need to accommodate human diversity and reflect different approaches to work-life balance and personal wellbeing. Future sustainable lifestyles support equity, efficiency and sufficiency in order to live within global resource limits. People are supported by systems and infrastructure that enable, maintain and sustain more sustainable ways of living.

The **SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyles 2050, European Social Platform project** fills a gap in current research by consolidating knowledge, identifying trends and promising practices, and envisioning possible sustainable lifestyle futures. A **roadmap of action strategies** for different societal actors will be developed, including 2012-2050 pathways to enabling sustainable living across Europe by 2050. This roadmap will support future research and policy agendas on the EU and national levels.

This document presents the project's preliminary findings. It provides policy considerations from its review of existing knowledge and examples of current **promising practice**. It presents **four alternative and emerging visions** of future sustainable lifestyles, and it explores the **drivers**, **barriers** and **gatekeepers** that may help or hinder the proliferation of more sustainable living options.

A final policy brief will be delivered at the conclusion of the project, in December 2012, and will include concrete policy recommendations.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Current unsustainable lifestyle trends – The challenges to overcome

The project's baseline research on sustainable lifestyles aims to better understand the relationships between lifestyles, the conditions that frame them, and the resulting environmental and social impacts in Europe today and in the future.

Modern European lifestyles are unsustainable. Overproduction, to supply overconsumption, puts too much pressure on natural resources and impacts negatively on environment, economy (individual and collective), health and social relations.

Current unsustainable lifestyle trends – the challenges to overcome:

- Together, final consumption of food and drink, private transportation and housing lead to 70-80% of Europe's environmental impacts.
- Meat and dairy consumption alone account for almost one quarter (24%) of all final consumption impacts.
- Domestic heating, water consumption, appliances and electronics account for 40% of Europe's total energy consumption (with 67% of EU-27 household energy consumption linked to space heating alone).
- Car ownership in the EU-27 increased by 35% between 1990 and 2007. EU-drivers own over one third of the world's 750 million automobiles.
- In the EU-27, approximately 60% of adults and over 20% of children are overweight or obese. Coronary heart diseases, often associated with fatty foods and smoking, are the most common death cause in the EU.

Promising practices and social innovation

Changing current lifestyle patterns and behaviours will be difficult; people will be reluctant to change. To guide people towards more sustainable living we need to understand what drives their diverse lifestyles, and help to visualise inspiring alternatives. The SPREAD project has identified cases of social innovation and promising living practices, from across Europe that show potential to address the unsustainable impacts of current lifestyles.

Current trends include:

- The rise of collaborative consumption (sharing, swapping, trading, etc.) which reveals a shift from ownership of goods to access to goods and services, and from being passive consumers to becoming co-producers (e.g. growing your own food);
- Growing evidence of more sustainable ways of utilising products and services – such as efficient living (wasting less), different living (focus on high quality goods and services) and sufficient living (reducing consumption);
- Community and city action that demonstrates the success of participatory approaches to sustainable living and mobility options - such as eco-towns, sustainable city initiatives and Transition Towns;
- Behaviour change at the household level shows increasing willingness to invest in energy efficiencies that save energy and money;
- The promotion of walking, cycling and public transport at the municipal levels enables more healthy living options;
- The development of promising synergies in health, equity and well-being due to a re-examination of the way we live, eat and move.

In order to envision how today's promising sustainable living practices could evolve in the future, the SPREAD consortium, working with a broad group of stakeholders from across Europe, has interpreted and projected these practices into the future resulting in four cross-thematic and emerging visions of potential future sustainable lifestyles.

Envisioning the future

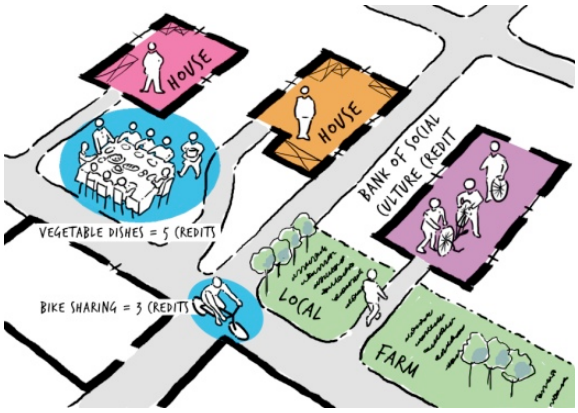
Visions are stories that can help a variety of actors – citizens, businesses, civil society organisations, and policy makers – to: picture alternative futures and more sustainable lifestyle options; to understand their role in this transition; and to make everyday decisions accordingly.

These visions can be used as a tool to facilitate change processes by animating 'social conversations' about future lifestyles. They can help to identify what is sufficient for life satisfaction, stripping away the unnecessary, and to understand the diversity of people's needs and wants. Visions also provide a mechanism for exploring the drivers, barriers and possible gatekeepers that may foster or block progress.

Many alternative, and more sustainable, solutions exist already. They require choices that are often interlinked with the decisions of multiple stakeholders. This interdependence highlights the importance of networks and collaborative decision-making. Visions can help to identify the actors that are part of the system and to shed light on the different capabilities, possibilities and interests of those actors, in order to find common frameworks for action.

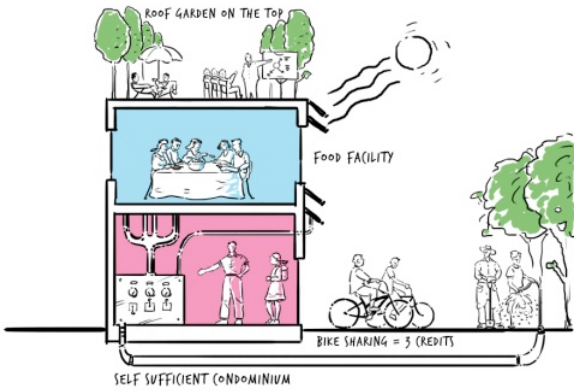
The following are visions of possible lifestyles in future sustainable societies.

ALTERNATIVE VISION 1: ECONOMIES FOR DENSE COMMUNITIES



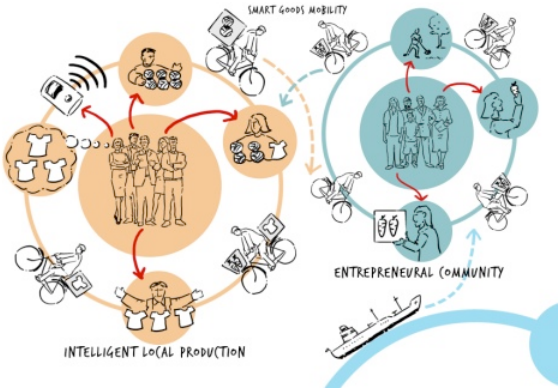
Rationing, *distributed systems*, *density* and *reward systems* are at the centre of this vision, which considers the inevitable challenges to sustainability, the limited availability of some common goods, which may require rationing. As resource consumption cannot be managed only through individual, voluntary behavioural change, top-down approaches will also be needed. 'Distributed economies' (systems of regionally distributed production) enable people to produce and consume locally, and to trade the excess with others. More land is saved for farming by compacting lifestyles, so that private space is reduced in favour of multi-functional, shared facilities. Complementary health monitoring infrastructures, supporting healthy lifestyles, are also required. Finally, this vision uses a 'reward system' to encourage sustainable living: it allows people to pay for services through credits, instead of money.

ALTERNATIVE VISION 2: THE CONVENIENCE OF TRUST



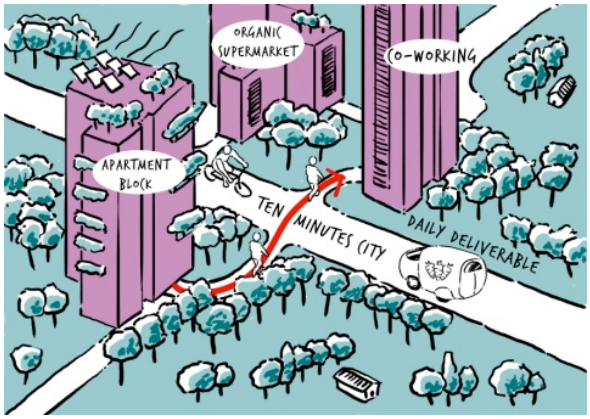
The value of *community* is the key social driver and principle of this vision. Community is a long-term value in 2050. It informs the structure of everyday life and society, effectively supports people's lives and is a pillar of public and private initiatives. Communities are enabled to become self-sufficient, aware and resilient in terms of resources, health, well-being, social equity skills and competence. The organizational principle is *convenience* offered by collaborative-based infrastructure, mutual support solutions, new household-centric economies. They are perceived as advantageous, attractive and relevant to everyday life. *Trust* is equally important, being the result of closer personal relationships, individual engagement in the community, reciprocity, and the relations that unfold in convivial situations. Everyone is invited and enabled to contribute to the creation of this community-based organization in different ways according to their capacities, motivations and lifestyles.

ALTERNATIVE VISION 3: ENTREPRENEURIAL AND SELF-AWARE SOCIETY, CONNECTED WEALTH



For the purpose of building one society that promotes health and well-being, this vision connects and builds upon *community*, to foster *global-local* inter-linkages, and a self-awareness of the individual role in the broader system. Individuals are socially engaged and entrepreneurial. Communities and individuals endorse a culture of mutual improvement and empathy, which fosters collaboration among people. Wealth is therefore generated in this vision by values and decoupled from material growth. This becomes evident in spatially organized food systems that are also educational and participatory and optimized through technologies, or in smart materials management, where small scale production empowered by technologies enable people to become micro-scale manufacturers. Technology plays a strong role in this vision by systematically empowering people at every level of society. Examples include: the hyper-efficient and smart management of personal and goods mobility, which fulfils personal needs and desires; or a system of indicators that channels performance, a the collective city level, back to people in terms of energy and material consumption, well-being and equity.

ALTERNATIVE VISION 4: HAPPY SHARING COMMUNITIES



This vision emphasises the sharing of goods, infrastructure and access to culture through *collaborative services*. Products and services are designed to be used collectively and to facilitate sharing and collaboration within the community. This contributes to equity among members. Engagement and participation are encouraged at every level and facilitated by a general 'down-shifting' of society. A reduction in working hours promotes healthy lifestyles and allows people to get involved in organizing the sharing so as to compensate the lower income with other direct benefits. Compact urban space design brings most daily living facilities close by. A *Toolbox for change makers* helps to enable the transition towards this vision. It includes: 1) wellbeing and happiness indicators at local levels; 2) alternative currencies and reward schemes; 3) a feedback system showing the consumption of resources at individual and community levels.

Emerging themes and policy considerations

The SPREAD project analysis of possible sustainable living futures reveals some common elements can be identified as pivotal issues and considerations for policies that will enable more sustainable ways of living across Europe. These reflections are the outcome of the project's synthesis of trends and opportunities that have emerged from the promising practices identified in our research to-date:

- ***The focus on community***: products and services are designed for collective use and for collaboration. Communities are enabled to become self-sufficient, aware and resilient in terms of resources, and competence. They are the pillar of the society, acting in between the public and the private;
- ***The power of people's engagement***: pro-active efforts and contributions to change for the purpose of a leading a more sustainable lifestyle are evidence of a more participative society. Feedback and monitoring systems support people in becoming self-aware of results and progress;
- ***The concept of distributed economies***: people are driven to produce and consume locally and seasonally, shortening the production-distribution chains and de-mediating producer-consumer relationship;
- ***The importance of density***: the built environment is retrofitted and compacted in order to have daily living facilities close by, saving energy and saving land for farming and nature;
- ***The emergence of non-monetary systems***: reward schemes, alternative currencies and the principle of reciprocity to incentivize people to rethink the value of services and goods in terms of their actual costs and benefits.
- ***The consideration of human-centred infrastructure***: city and community infrastructure is designed for human well-being and with the user in mind. Design for efficiency can only be realized if it is accessible, desirable and easy for the user.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

Realising these emerging and alternative sustainable lifestyle visions can be enabled or hindered by some critical factors. This section explores the cross-cutting drivers, barriers and gatekeepers as considerations for policy-makers.

Enablers and drivers

***Community building and empowerment*:** in all domains of life, we must consider shifting the focus of design, planning and action from the individual to the community in order to move away from top-down approaches and enable communities to take responsibility and lead by example. For example:

- *Innovative urban and community planning* that focuses on participatory processes based on equity, mutual support and stakeholder involvement can bring about more connected communities and sustainable neighbourhoods.
- *Vicinity* goes hand in hand with efficient housing, as energy savings achieved through the design and construction of efficient buildings and appliances are preconditions for dense neighbourhoods.
- Optimising performance standards for buildings and appliances, proposing individual metering, feedback systems, and facilitating shared housing are measures that can increase user efficiency.

Collaborative infrastructure: human-centred infrastructure will be needed to support access to shared goods and services (such as cars, bikes, and household goods), making it more convenient yet cost effective. Community based consumption can help to reduce the impacts of individual consumption. For example:

- Smart ICT/technological innovation: web and mobile technologies can play a critical role in building large-scale, sharing communities for the future. The multifunctionality of buildings and spaces must be increased by opening them up for broader use as shared contexts for the community. Services and technologies for sharing need to be developed to make space cheaper. Many technological options for more sustainable lifestyles are already available: policy makers can create the conditions to ensure their “acceptance” and wide deployment as enablers of social innovation.
- Smart renewable energy solutions: support for distributed renewable energy production and consumption, together with solutions to improve energy supply options for individual households, can bring about significant improvements in energy saving. In addition, consumption issues can be addressed through demand side management, which involves both ICT/technology and behavioural change – at household, SME, and industry level.
- Smart intermodal transport solutions: European integrated transport systems are becoming more sophisticated. Linking air, rail, road and personal transport options significantly increases efficiency, and convenience for the user. Communication strategies will be required to shift users from current transport preferences to widespread use of intermodal options. Well-planned cities can reduce mobility needs and consequently the use of individual transportation. Local scale businesses/services such as private kindergartens and neighbourhood people care facilities are important.

Enabling behaviour shifts and engagement: a deeper understanding of how people think and the thoughtful design of contexts is required to normalise sustainable options and “nudge” consumers in a direction, without restricting their freedom of choice. Individual behaviour changes need to be supported and sustainable choices made easy and desirable by

a range of options. For example:

- Giving visibility to consumption levels and resource use can help people to alter their behaviour while becoming more aware of their own environmental footprint. In the same way, increased awareness of health, well-being and equity is a societal leader for change.

Alternative economy and business models: rethinking the GDP-based value system to include other indicators such as environment, well-being and quality of life, and balancing growth, profits and consumption could, for example, reduce the focus on material wealth, especially in personal terms. For example:

- *Alternative business models* that connect business with social entrepreneurs and their value models may bring about more sustainable activities, mixing profit/not-for-profit, public/private, individual/collective.
- The internalisation of external costs (true cost legislation) to the environment and society (sustainability tax), will be important to introduce a pricing system based on ecological footprint. Non-monetary exchange or local currency systems are another alternative.

Barriers

Societal and cultural norms can be a significant barrier to changing lifestyles toward more sustainable ones. Societal norms (e.g. economic rewards), cultural norms (e.g. meat eating, ownership), ethical and cultural issues in different housing and living structures, unwillingness to share, need for privacy, lack of accessibility and of perceived quality, can be obstacles to mainstream sustainable practices. A deeper understanding of the variety of motivations for different segments of households will be required in order to propose desirable and more sustainable alternatives.

Economic system: current aspirations for prosperity are intrinsically linked to existing patterns of economic growth. The current situation is the result of the belief in unlimited natural resources and in continuous economic growth. For 200 years, these two assumptions have facilitated constant improvements in labour productivity at the cost of resources that are underpriced, and of an environment that is rarely priced at all. Despite many actors in society now accepting the need to redefine the current economic paradigm, it still remains a barrier to change.

Existing infrastructure**:** the construction sector is a rather conservative industry where new and more sustainable designs, building materials and construction methods are only emerging and being implemented slowly. The energy efficiency of buildings is also challenged by high costs and long payback times for renovations. This is exacerbated by a tendency for homeowners to prioritise immediate gratification over long-term benefits and by the fact that home occupiers, who often do not own the building, are not motivated to renovate it.

Energy systems & distribution, and increasing energy demand**:** the existing energy system is still organised around the idea of centralised production and supply, rather than around distributed production and consumption. The incumbent system, regulation, norms and powerful stakeholders are not geared towards a radical transition of the energy system into one that fosters more sustainable and distributed solutions. In addition, a huge potential for energy saving needs to be untapped through tailored energy demand side management interventions.

Education**:** there is a gap in education for sustainability that calls at least for the integration of specific programmes into the academic curriculum and into life-long training, if not even for the cross-cutting integration of sustainability issues into the whole curriculum. It is also not clear whether we currently understand all of the new skills that will be required to live more sustainably into the future.

Who are the gatekeepers?

Gatekeepers are actors that are in the position to enable or prevent a shift towards more sustainable lifestyles. Some main clusters are identified here:

***European regulatory authorities*.** Promising and successful initiatives are those that consider environmental, economic and social sustainability as well as across-the-board health and well-being. Consequently we must highlight the crucial role that the authorities play in:

- bringing about a people-centric and holistic approach to policy-making, which can foster participation;
- including health and equity aspects in planning, agriculture, education, finance, social affairs and welfare, trade and transport sectors;
- supporting the shift towards more sustainable ways of living across the social gradient at different levels: national, regional and local.

Local governments. They play a key role in overseeing the planning of infrastructure, building plans and implementing participatory strategies. In particular, city planners have an important function in:

- co-designing cities and communities, together with citizens and other relevant stakeholders, which could enable sustainable lifestyles;
- supporting the establishment of local scale businesses/services that strengthen the community;
- developing policies and targeting resources to ensure that subsequent impacts do not exacerbate environmental and social inequalities;
- including health, well-being and equity approaches in all policies;
- analysing the trade-offs, benefits and drawbacks of different existing systems and global corporative business models.

Public health systems. Common approaches and interventions by policy makers and professionals can be developed in the area of health promotion to support more sustainable lifestyles. These actors are pivotal in:

- evaluating the costs and benefits to society, health and well-being of sustainable development interventions, usually due to environment protection and climate change;
- evaluating and considering the health savings which may work in favour of policy change and development (e.g. reduction in sick leave, doctors' appointments and hospitalization);
- assessing and monitoring impacts of policies and strategies on health and well-being (e.g. using health impact assessment tools, and an integrated approach).

Social network technologies and infrastructure (for collaborative consumption). Social network related infrastructures play a tremendous role in enabling viable alternatives: such as access to goods and services instead of ownership, and becoming co-producers of goods and services instead of passive consumers. The social network infrastructure can:

- promote healthy and sustainable lifestyles with equal access and opportunities for all socio-economic groups;
- promote social innovation together with technological innovation, taking into account their environmental and social impact;
- promote the scale up of enabling technologies.

Social entrepreneurs. A social entrepreneur prioritises the social value of entrepreneurial activities rather than financial gain alone. In acknowledging the importance of both peoples' engagement and alternative business models, social entrepreneurs play a unique role in leading change by:

- creating value through the promotion of sustainable businesses, and innovating products and services to enable sustainable behaviour for consumers;
- creating new forms of enterprise, which combine profit and non-profit, public and private, solidarity and market;

- ensuring accessibility and affordability of products and services for all socio-economic groups (e.g. addressing the higher costs often associated with environment-friendly products compared to their more harmful counterparts).

Social innovators. People acting to demonstrate more sustainable behaviour patterns are fundamental agents of change. Their intentional and voluntary effort to change lifestyles is an indispensable bottom-up driver for change, as they often act as champions of new and promising behaviour even in absence of supporting infrastructures. They must be given the opportunity to:

- test small scale initiatives, as they can be important test-beds for large scale sustainable solutions;
- invest in 'clean' technologies;
- participate in planning and decision-making;
- share space, time and resources, both to reduce costs and create social contexts;
- communicate their practise to others and facilitate a learning process.

Educational institutions. The integration of sustainability education into every stage of every curriculum is a crucial factor in creating a more aware and competent society. Along with this, interdisciplinary and practice-oriented research and training can better teach future generations to organise everyday living in an optimal and sustainable fashion. In particular, the education system is able to:

- introduce more practices that support doing things together;
- promote civic activity and other forms of action in the public interest;
- focus on teaching home economics with an integrated and multi-dimensional approach to capacities, choices and priorities on a small-scale, and associated impacts at all levels.

Product and service designers, and architects are able to build both visions and actual solutions for different lifestyles by:

- integrating their skills in multi-disciplinary teams to design highly efficient housing systems without compromising their inhabitants' wishes and needs;
- collaboratively managing services and social integration initiatives to complement housing with social infrastructure, making for stronger, interacting communities.

Business and corporations. By incorporating the costs of 'negative externalities' companies can effectively reduce their impact on the natural and social world. Business approaches can benefit from new production and product efficiencies. However, few business models question rising consumption patterns and promote sustainable living. Promising exceptions that are beginning to influence what and how people consume are:

- collaborative consumption business models;
- direct connection between production and consumption;
- community enabling technologies;
- investment in sustainable supply chains and SME infrastructure.

NGOs and CSOs. Non-governmental and civil society organisations foster debate on the need for meaningful change in values and norms in society, promote sustainable values and encourage citizen engagement by:

- improving coalition building among stakeholders;
- collaborating closely with the academic community to foster the practical application of their scientific knowledge;
- applying their knowledge and perspectives to actively set the political agenda on a number of issues, including alternative ways to measure societal development and new approaches to economic progress.

Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, innovators, researchers and civil society actors

A systemic, multi-sectoral, human-centred approach should be adopted when developing policies and strategies to enable more sustainable lifestyles. They should include health, agriculture, education, finance, urban planning, social affairs and welfare, trade and transport, energy, environmental protection and climate change.

A deeper understanding of individual lifestyle diversity is required to develop a broad range of solutions and options that support changing behaviour. In particular, the availability of new kinds of infrastructure that stimulate and enable more sustainable ways of living is a key factor determining the sustainability of an individual lifestyle. People's aspirations for prosperity are so far still intrinsically linked to current patterns of unsustainable economic growth (meat and dairy consumption, single car use, domestic energy use, and health risks linked to food and leisure activity are some of the hot spots).

Promising examples of more sustainable ways of living are already emerging. These examples **need to be tested** to understand how far they will get us on track to sustainability and what critical gaps remain. In order to judge whether those practices will add up to sustainable lifestyles, indicators and system boundaries need to be defined and applied. They also need to be reinforced and scaled up if proven to advance and support more sustainable lifestyles.

Health and equity aspects should be an integral part of all measures and initiatives relating to climate change and sustainability. These include: analysis of the trade-offs, benefits and drawbacks of different existing systems; development of the capacity to identify and monitor potential environmental inequalities across different social groups; special attention to the needs and priorities of children and older people.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Objective of the research

SPREAD [Social Platform Identifying Research and Policy Needs for Sustainable Lifestyles] is a 24-month project running from January 2011 to December 2012.

The SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyles 2050 European Social Platform project aims to:

- inspire change amongst all actors and draw attention to the role of policy in stimulating change towards 2050 by providing a vision of more sustainable ways of living and scenarios of possible futures;
- consolidate the existing theoretical, empirical, practical and experiential knowledge on trends towards sustainability;
- collect promising practices on sustainable ways of living;
- produce alternative future scenarios of sustainable lifestyles entailing social and behavioural innovation;
- develop a roadmap of opportunity spaces and action strategies for different societal actors to enable the shift to more sustainable lifestyles by 2050.

Research method and next steps

The main feature of the SPREAD project is a multi-stakeholder dialogue platform, which seeks to engage and inspire people from across society. It provides a number of thematic and cross-cutting working group discussions, a people's forum and an on-line community facilitating a broad societal engagement of various stakeholders throughout the project.

The project is participatory as transformational change requires swift action at all levels of society and amongst all actors. SPREAD also aims to bring a 'real-world' perspective into the discussion, by examining the reality that normal citizens face every day when striving for more sustainable lifestyles.

The visions discussed in this document are stories of possible futures which explore alternative solutions to current lifestyle impacts in the areas of living, moving, consuming, health & society. These stories have been developed from the creative interpretation of a collection of current promising sustainable living practices and initiatives projected into the future, which prepared the project to think about possible future scenarios.

In the next phase of the project, key considerations and emerging visions for more sustainable living will be developed further into scenarios of possible sustainable living futures for 2050 where current barriers to more sustainable ways of living have been overcome. To do this, the project will apply an interactive back-casting methodology that will result in a roadmap of action strategies for individuals, businesses, civil society, research and policy makers. The intention is to mainstream or 'spread' sustainable lifestyles across Europe into the future.

A final policy brief offering more concrete recommendations for policy, research and other societal stakeholders will be delivered on conclusion of the project in December 2012.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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Further reading

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2. SPREAD Sustainable lifestyles baseline report (2011). “Sustainable Lifestyles: Today’s facts and tomorrow’s trends”, FP7 SSH-2010-41 EU